SECRETARY HAWKINS

THE RED RUNNERS

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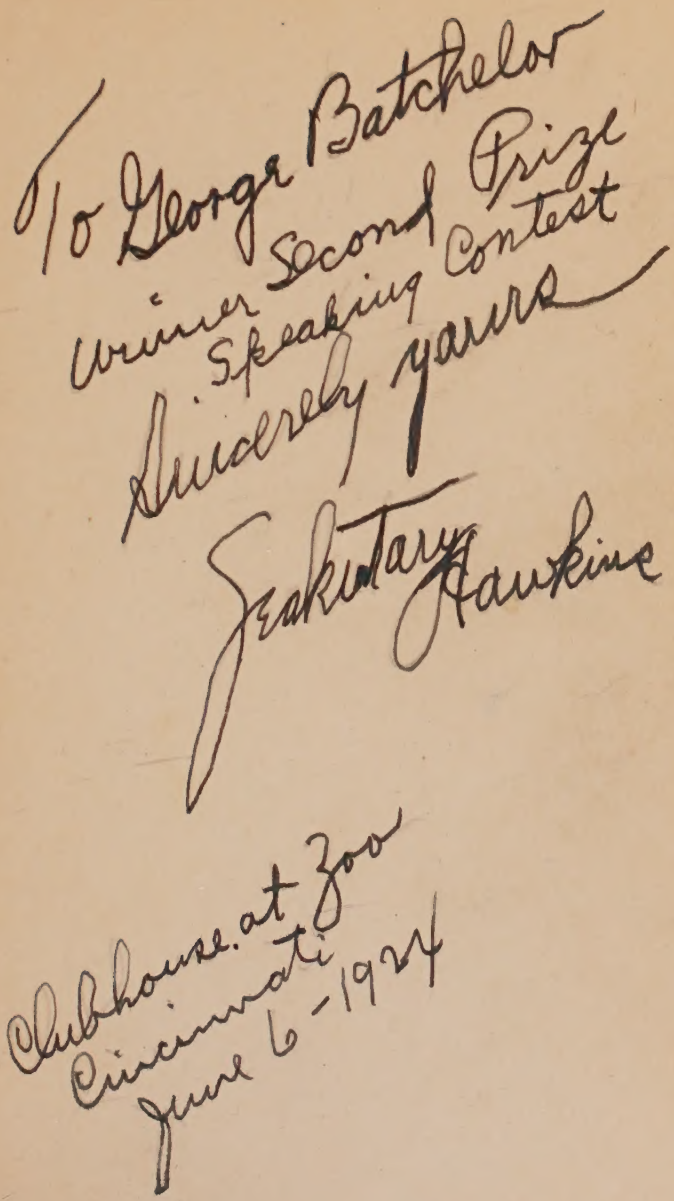
To George Batchelor
winner Second Prize
Speaking Contest
Sincerely yours
Secretary Hawkins
Clubhouse at Zoo
Cincinnati
June 6 - 1924

THE RED RUNNERS

HARKINSON'S LAST VISIT

THE RED RUNNERS

BY
SECKATARY HAWKINS

Illustrations by
CARLL B. WILLIAMS

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TO

MY OLD TEACHER

"One Fine Fella"

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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SECKATARY HAWKINS.

Contents

Chapter		Page
I.	Home Again.	1
II.	A Boxing Match.	12
III.	Harkinson.	24
IV.	The Camp on the Island.	34
V.	The Woodchoppers.	44
VI.	Singing by the Campfire.	54
VII.	Ham Gardner's Tip.	65
VIII.	Hawkins Against Harkinson.	76
IX.	Hawkins Dons the Gloves.	86
X.	The End of Vacation.	96
XI.	Link's Farewell Party.	105
XII.	The Red Runners.	117
XIII.	The Silver Cup.	127
XIV.	Shadow Loomis Joins.	138
XV.	The Call of a Nightbird.	149
XVI.	A Pair of Owls.	159
XVII.	Seventh in Line.	169
XVIII.	A Hallowe'en Phantom.	180
XIX.	The Face in the Dark.	191
XX.	The Pelhams in Trouble.	201
XXI.	The Canary.	212

CONTENTS

Chapter		Page
XXII.	The Hidden Houseboat.	222
XXIII.	Androfski the Silent.	232
XXIV.	Saving the Secret.	242
XXV.	Lasky Goes Home.	251
XXVI.	A Bag of Toys.	263
XXVII.	New Year's Eve.	274
XXVIII.	A Rolling Stone.	284
XXIX.	The Trap that Didn't Work.	294
XXX.	Harkinson's Last Visit.	305
XXXI.	The Prayer in the Log House.	315
XXXII.	The Roundup.	326

THE RED RUNNERS

THE RED RUNNERS

I

Home Again

HOME again!

Ah, boy! How good it looked to me! You fellows who have never been a thousand miles away from home—you don't know what this homecoming meant to me. Here was the old river! The old trees, the old bank, the old hollow, the old shack! The morning sun of midsummer time sifted through the softly swaying branches and fell in splotches around the place I stood upon. And I looked across the river toward Pelham, still sound asleep in its town of tumbledown houses, and then my mind went back to Cuba—

Well, there's no place like home, be it ever so tumbledown, be it ever so humble. I had arrived home the night before, too late to see any of the boys, and my folks were so glad to see me that I had to sit up until midnight telling them of all our experiences in Cuba, and I fell asleep at last. The others in our party went to Doc's house for the night. But early in the morning I opened my eyes. At once I felt a longing to see the river bank—the old hangout place, and I hurried into my clothes and sneaked out all alone. The birds were making music in the treetops along the way, and I felt as happy as a lark. Soon, I said to myself, I shall meet all my boys; soon we shall be talking together in our little clubhouse. Oh, how happy it made me feel to know that I was back here, home again!

I stood on that little hill on the top of the river bank and gazed around me; it all looked the same as it had before I left; only the trees were fresh green again, the rushes had grown somewhat out into the shallow water, and the cliffs were covered more this year with green growth than I had ever seen them in my lifetime. High up beyond me was that cliff in which Stoner used to have his hiding place; beyond that rose the topmost peak where we had seen his signal lights. The Pelhams had a new wharf built on their side of the river, and a dozen smart-looking canoes were upside down upon it. Not a sign of any living thing was to be seen; it was sunrise, and I was back home, there all by myself waiting anxiously until I could shake my boys by the hand again.

I chuckled to myself as I thought of how they would greet me, and, turning back, I started for home, hoping ma would have breakfast waiting. As I turned I saw a movement in the bushes that lined the path. I stopped again and waited. There came no further move of any kind, or any sound. I started on again, and, as I did so, the bushes parted and a boy stepped out in front of me. He was new to me. I had never seen his face. But I liked it the moment my eyes fell upon it. It was a bright-looking face and a regular boyish one, with eyes that spoke of mischief. He barred my way with outstretched arms.

"Wait just a minute, sir," he said in a commanding tone. "What are you doing here?"

I could not help laughing, but I smothered it as much as I could.

"I'm just looking around. I hope I haven't been doing something that you do not like."

He looked at me seriously and said:

"If you haven't a good reason for being here I'll have to order you off. We don't allow strangers here."

"Oh, excuse me," I said quickly. "I'm sure I didn't mean to intrude. But may I ask who you mean when you say 'we'?"

He took my arm and, turning half around, pointed down into the hollow, where a bright new flag of the Stars and Stripes waved above a rooftop, almost hidden in the treetops.

"The boys who hang out in that clubhouse," he said in a very serious voice, "run this whole place. They don't leave anybody loaf around. And I'm overseer of it. They just appointed me. You see that flag?"

"Yeah," I said, "it's a beauty. I bet it cost four dollars."

He grunted.

"It cost six," he said, "and we've got the whole porch decorated with smaller ones. They cost a quarter apiece. We've got to celebrate, you know?"

"What for?" I asked, and then, "Oh, yes, it's the Fourth of July pretty soon, isn't it?"

He gave me a look as of pity, then shook his head.

"That's not it," he said. "We're going to have company. We decorated the shack and everything, and we've got fireworks, too."

"Is that so?" I exclaimed. "Well, I think I'll go down and have a look at those decorations."

I started down the path, but he grabbed me.

"Oh, no you won't," he said, "not while I'm overseer. We don't allow it. You just take yourself away from here as fast as you can. If the boys catch me talking to you friendly like they'll think I'm in with the Pelham fellows, or something."

I smiled at him, but he kept a serious face.

"May I ask your name?" I asked.

He pointed up the path.

"Git," he said, "as fast as those fat legs of your'n will take you."

I said no more, but went up the path. I had to chuckle to myself, however, as I went, and when I got home mother was waiting with battercakes and 'lasses for breakfast.

Oh, gee, boys, it's great to be back home—and summertime, too, vacation and everything.

. . . . . .

It was about 10 o'clock when I went back down the path toward the river. When I reached the woodland I heard a very familiar sound—the music of the old organ that used to be Lew Hunter's favorite pastime in our old houseboat headquarters. And I could hear the voices of several boys singing, and I knew that Lew Hunter still had his boys in training, and that singing practice was one of the daily duties. How sweet those voices sounded! I could not recognize them; there were several, some singing soprano and others alto, while Lew's rich tenor rose above them all. The words of the song they were singing came to me clearly:

"*The mists of the morning are rolling away,*
The stars quickly fade at the coming day;
The foam of the billows already I see,
And there lies my bark still in waiting for me."

Ah, boy, how it sounded to me, just home again after a seven-months' absence, fifteen-hundred miles away. I reached the path to the clubhouse unseen. And there I stopped and looked down at the clubhouse. It was my first look in seven months. How pretty it was! The porch had been extended around the little shack,

I STOOD ON THAT LITTLE HILL ON TOP OF THE RIVER BANK, AND GAZED AROUND ME.

and the whole building had been newly painted, the body green, the trimmings white, and the trees and bushes that clustered about it seemed to love the little place as much as I loved it myself. The clubhouse was gay with little flags, while from a high pole, rising from the porch above the door, there floated a big silk banner, the greatest emblem in the world—the Stars and Stripes. I took off my hat and waited until the singing ended.

Then I slowly walked down to the steps of the porch. There was not a soul in sight. Lew certainly had them all well trained in the matter of singing practice. I walked up the steps slowly and shoved gently on the door.

"Hi, fellas," I said in a low voice.

They all turned as if they had been frightened. I saw a bunch of happy faces looking at me—my old faces of my old boys, and, you can believe this or not, I had tears in my eyes as I stood there and held out my hand to them. They stared at me for fully a minute, I believe, and then one of them shouted:

"*Hawkins!*" And he came running over to me. It was Jerry Moore, great big, old Jerry Moore, with a tan, freckled face, and stub nose; yeah, he came and grabbed me by my shoulders, and the others yelled, too, and came to me. They almost bowled me over with their weight.

"Git back there," yelled Jerry, in his old-time way. "Git back there, Bill Darby; give the Seckatary air. What you mean by acting that-a way?"

But I silenced Jerry, and shook them all by the hand. Dick Ferris, still the Captain, demanded the right to sit next to me. Lew Hunter came up, after all the others had had their say, and took my hand and wrung it warmly.

"Dear old pal," he said, with a smile, "just been thinking you had passed us up. But I knew you would come. Some of the boys said they thought you would not want to have any more to do with the club when you got back. But I said you would."

"You know me, Lew," I said. "It's me for this bunch of fellows as long as I can stick. Say, I wouldn't give up this clubhouse full of boys for anything I saw all the way to Cuba and back again."

Then I went from one to the other and talked a little with each. Bill Darby was sore at Jerry for "bawling him out" when I came in, and still wanted me to referee a fight between him and Jerry to settle it. But I settled it with a few soothing words in Bill's ear about a ball game we would have that afternoon. Johnny McLarren and Roy Dobel followed me around everywhere I went, and listened to every word I said to everybody else. In fact, I couldn't be at rest a minute before some one of them would be firing questions at me faster than I could meet them.

But presently there came something to put an end to it, in the way of a noise out on the porch, and before anyone could rush to see who it was, the door was flung open and a boy stood there. He was a tall, good-looking boy. At first I did not recognize him. But at the second look I knew him.

"It's Link!" I yelled.

"Not if I know him," said Jerry Moore.

But in came Link, the old Skinny Guy of other days, smiling and holding his hands out. The boys went up to him slowly, but when he said "Hi, fellas," they knew that voice. But what was it that made him look so different? Of course he had new clothes. They were bought for him in Jacksonville, by Doc Waters and Link's

daddy. But there was something else about him that puzzled me, but—ah, yes, now I knew what it was: Link had had his hair cut!

He was a different boy. Still as skinny as ever, but with a different expression in his eyes, my Skinny Guy was no longer the same raggedy, barefoot, tangle-haired youth that I had met one December morning swiping lumber from our side of the river to build tree houses for the Pelhams. No, no! Link Lambert had changed. He had grown taller. He wore decent clothes, and—to top it off as the greatest wonder of the world—he had had his long, straggling locks cut.

"Well," I said to myself, as I watched the boys clustering around him with greetings and laughter, "the trip to Cuba did some good for Link, anyhow."

Dick Ferris and Lew Hunter separated themselves from the crowd and came over to me. "Hawkins," said Link, "we have something to show you. Come with us."

I followed them to the rear beyond the table and chairs of the meeting room, where a curtain hung. I had not noticed this when I came in. It had not been there when I left. It was new to me. They drew back the curtain and said "Step in."

I stepped into a new room that had been built to the clubhouse. It was a pretty little place, with two windows and a rear door, a couple of chairs on each side, a small table with a little lamp with a green shade, and an oak writing desk.

"Well, of all things," I said. "You boys have been improving the clubhouse since I've been gone. This is fine, sure."

They both were smiling, well pleased.

"It's for you," said Dick.

"For me?" I repeated in surprise. "You made this room for me?"

They nodded.

"Yes," said Lew Hunter, "this is the Seckatary's writing room. And we made up our minds before you came back that we wouldn't have any other fella for seckatary but you."

"Oh," I said, "thanks. That's nice, even if you didn't ask me about it. But say, this is fine. I'll feel like writing some things in here, boys."

Now weren't they the real kind of boys a fellow likes to chum with, and do anything for that he is able to do? I sat down at the little desk they had put there for me, and smiled as I saw the many little cards, with verses and little notes, welcoming me back, and wishing me luck, and I dropped my chin in my hands and fell to thinking. They both skipped out quietly and allowed the curtain to fall back into place. What a fine bunch of boys, thought I, and how glad I am to be back with them instead of being with those Rafaels and Montillas and Gabriels and other revolutionists in that island far away. I imagine that the boys thought they should leave me there by myself to appreciate their show of kind feelings; for anyway I heard them scurrying out, Link in their midst, and I knew they were headed for the ball grounds in the hollow. I opened the Seckatary's book that I had not seen since I left. In it, mostly pasted in the proper places, were all the writings that I had made in Cuba, copies of which I had sent regularly to Dick Ferris. On the front of a new book that lay beside it was printed

in Lew Hunter's hand: "Seckatary Hawkins—His Book." I smiled. A sound came from the front room. I looked up. The curtains parted, and I looked into the face of that self-styled "overseer," the boy who had told me to "Git" earlier in the morning. He looked at me with open mouth and wide eyes. Then he blurted out:

"Was it you I met this morning—you the fella' these boys were waiting for?"

"Yes," I said, smiling, "I am Seckatary Hawkins."

He grinned at me, and then slowly held out his hand to me.

"I guess I'm a bone-head," he said, "but shucks! I didn't know; never met you in my life before—you'll excuse me, won't you?"

"With all my heart," I answered, "if you'll tell me who you are."

"Perry—I'm Perry Stokes, sir," he said, "but they all just call me Perry. I just joined the bunch a month ago—came down from Watertown, sir. Hope you'll like me as well as the other boys do."

"I'm sure I will, Perry," I answered. "Will you run down to the ball lot and ask the boys to come up. I'm anxious to have a meeting before Doc Waters and Judge Granbery come."

He clapped his green cap on his head and was off like a shot. I smiled and followed him to the door, where I stood until he disappeared in the green. I stood there, happy as a lark, thinking of good times in store for us this summer, when from the river path a figure approached.

Ah, how could I ever forget that figure! The same ragged, shiftless kid, with a surly look and an expression on his face that made you think he was always

hunting a shoulder with a chip on it. Briggen it was, Briggen of the Pelham gang across the river.

He stopped short when he saw me standing in the door. For a full minute he gazed at me, as though I were a ghost. Then, without a sound, he turned and quickly fled back to the river.

II

A Boxing Match

WE HAD a great celebration on the Fourth—I never saw so much fireworks and decorations. Of course the boys had the clubhouse all decked out in honor of the holiday, but it seemed to me that they imagined it was more on account of our homecoming than anything else.

The day following our arrival we had a meeting in the clubhouse, which made it seem like old times. Dick Ferris sat himself down in the Captain's chair, and Link and I took our regular places, as though we had been doing that very thing right along. I could not help laughing at Perry Stokes, the new boy who had been appointed "overseer" by Dick Ferris, of course, to look after things while the boys were not around. Perry had a funny way about him, which seemed to be that he imagined he was a very important person around the place. He arranged the chairs, and dusted the table, opened the windows, got my book and pen and ink out, put the Captain's wooden hammer in front for his place and all such things. I watched him with a smile as he flitted about with such a serious look on his face that would lead you to think he was a mighty important member. But he was a nice kid, not fresh, but just anxious to make good in the job to which his Captain had appointed him.

I had told Link to bring Will Standish down with him, but he came alone, and told me that Doc Waters had taken Will up to Watertown with him to buy a

few things. So we went ahead with our meeting. After that the fellows made me get up and tell them about the trip to Cuba and the fate of Rafael and the hidden treasure. It seemed that they could not believe that all that money that was hidden in the Granada casks had been lost. Of course, I had written each week what had happened, and they had received my writings regularly, for Dick Ferris, to whom I addressed them, pasted them in the Seckatary's book, where they could be read by every one in the club. But they thought I had just made it up. They didn't believe that we would let all that Granada gold get out of our hands. But I crossed my heart when I told it to them again there in the clubhouse, and I think they believe me now. Lew Hunter said he felt very sorry for Elam, the poor little lame man with the greenish face, although he said he did not like him the first time he read about that green face peeking in my bedroom window one midnight.

Oh, well, I told them some things, and then Link had to get up and make a little speech, but all that he could talk about was his new home down around Lexington, I believe, where he said he would live from now on.

Then Will Standish came—good old Will. Gee, he's a fine chap. So different. He came in the clubhouse smiling.

"Ah, there you are, Hawkins," he said, in his snappy tone; "I thought I should find the way easily. Hope I'm not intruding upon one of your meetings."

I laughed. "Come in, Will," I said; "we've just been waiting for you. I want you to meet the boys—yeah, these are the fellows I told you about when we were down in sunny Cuba together."

He came in smiling and happy and shook hands with

all of the boys, saying how glad he was to be here for a short vacation, and how happy he was to meet boys from Kentucky.

"You know," he said, "all that I heard from Hawkins while he was down in Cuba was about old Kentucky and his boys up here. And I'm sure he didn't stretch his tales about you—he told me about Stoner's Boy, too."

"The worst boy we ever saw around here," said Lew Hunter; "but I don't think he was anything compared with the frightful things you boys met in Cuba."

Will laughed. "There were some fast rides to make," he said. "I suppose Hawkins told you of my green motor boat? Yes? It's a whizzer. There's none on the river that can touch her. And we had to use her sometimes—once in the dark at night."

And so it went. The talk ran mostly about Cuba, but Will managed to ask some questions about us and our clubhouse doings and so forth, so that he got a pretty fair idea of our bunch and how we made life pleasant here on the river bank. The boys told him about our old times in the houseboat, after Will got to asking questions about that, and then they added a few tales of Stoner's Boy and our battles with the gray ghost. Will seemed to enjoy it, and the boys were attached to him from the start. As I sat there watching them, letting Will and the boys do all the talking, I thought that Will had a shade the better of my boys in knowledge. He had had better schooling, of course. But Will did not show off, nor try to make the others feel it; he just sat there, laughing, talking, acting as though he had known them all his life. That's the kind of a kid I like. You can always depend on a

fellow of that kind. He's bound to be a good friend in the long run, where others might fail if put to a test.

But one voice in that crowd was not heard. It was Jerry Moore. He sat over on his side of the table with his arms folded listening to the talk, his eyes upon Will Standish. "What's the matter with Jerry?" I thought to myself. And then, after we had gone outside for our usual ball game, I found out what was rankling in Jerry's breast. He came up to me as I came out.

"Hawkins," he said, "what kind of a sissy is this new fella' you brought with you?"

"Jerry," I said, "I'm surprised. You're a sensible fellow, and you shouldn't talk like that."

Jerry stuck out his chin and his hands doubled into fists. "I know," he said, "but us boys knew you all our life. Here comes a fella' what's never been a member of this here club, and he thinks you belong to him."

I couldn't "get" Jerry for a minute, and I looked him square in the eye.

"You know what I mean," he continued. "Listen, Hawkins. Ain't I been your best friend all your life?"

"Indeed you have, Jerry, old boy," I said, slapping him on the back, "and you and I are always going to be pardners. But Will is a good friend, too."

Jerry shook his head. "That won't go," he said, in a disappointed tone. "If that guy stays around here you won't ever be the same old Hawkins with us. You'll be having him to look after; you won't ever have time for us boys any more."

I wanted to say more to Jerry. I wanted to change this foolish notion in his mind, but Jerry is strong-headed. He always was. And he didn't give me time

to say any more to him. He simply turned and walked rapidly down to the ball lot in the hollow.

"Good old Jerry," I said to myself.

I went down to the hollow because the boys had asked me to umpire a game of scrub. But there was more to come of this. Bill Darby had invited Will to try his hand at pitching. Now Will had had some training in baseball down in Cuba. The Cubans are great baseball fans. Every little kid down there, white, brown, or black, begins to play baseball just as soon as he is big enough to hold a bat and ball. And Will had learned to pitch. In fact, he struck out Bill Darby, Lew Hunter, and Roy Dobel one after another. Dick Ferris got a hit, a straight bounder that Will picked up quickly and sailed to first in plenty of time. Johnny McLarren bounded a couple of fouls and fanned the wind for the third. Jerry grasped the bat next, and from the set look on his face I knew that Jerry had made up his mind to sail the ball to kingdom come just to show up this Will Standish.

Now, the worst part of this was, I was umpiring. I knew I was in for it, and when Will pitched the first ball Jerry made a vicious swing at it that turned him around like a spinning top. I had to laugh, and I hated to yell the "Strike One," but it had to be done. The boys standing around laughed, too. Jerry finally stopped spinning, and turned a scowling face upon the boys who laughed. Then he turned and gave me a hard look, spat upon his hands and took a firmer hold upon his bat. Will stood waiting for him to get position. Will did not laugh, nor smile. I suppose Will knew he had a tough customer, and I wondered whether or not Will would pitch an easy one for Jerry to hit, so that there would be no feeling in the matter. But when the

second pitched ball whizzed past Jerry's bat I knew that Will was sticking to his old form. "Strike!" I yelled again. Jerry stood up waiting for the next one. Jerry swung a heavy hickory bat, but he batted nothing. No, the ball reached the catcher's mitt on Dick Ferris's hand without injury of any kind. If that ball had connected with the blow that Jerry intended for it, it would have been "good-night ball."

Jerry was sore; it was plain to see that. He flung the bat into the grass with a grunt. Then he walked straight down to where Will Standish stood. Will waited for him with his hands resting upon his hips, but there was no smile on Will's face. As Jerry neared him I could see Will size him up from head to foot, and Will's face was white, but his eyes were sparkling with a light of courage.

"You're some pitcher," said Jerry, with a false smile, "but you don't count, see? You don't belong to this club, and you had no right to pitch. Hawkins is our Seckatary, I'll let you know that, and there ain't no Cuban goin' to coax him out of our club."

Will did not smile; he did not move. He looked Jerry straight in the eye for a second and then said:

"You are right, I don't count. I don't belong here. But I'm not going to stay, you know. I thought you ought to like a little good pitching, or I'd not have done it. You see I thought you would be entertained, that's all."

"Just like you," said Jerry, "you're a sissy—"

He didn't get any further. Will's position shifted in a flash, he was holding Jerry by both arms. "That doesn't go, you know," he said quietly in a shaking voice. "Really, you don't know me, or you wouldn't talk like that."

Jerry jerked away from him, and quickly picked up a piece of wood and put it on his shoulder. "All right, knock it off," he said; "show me you're no sissy." Will struck the bit of wood from Jerry's shoulder before the words were cold.

"I suppose that means fight," said Will. "It used to when I was smaller."

"You're right about that," returned Jerry. "We don't put chips on our shoulders for fun. It's fight. You'll be sorry, though."

Will walked up and pushed his face close up to Jerry's.

"But, listen," he said, "you'll not call me sissy again —not until you've beaten me in a fair fight."

"No, course not," answered Jerry. "There's rules in fighting, you know. I said what you are, and once is enough. You can prove you're not if you've got spunk."

Will turned to me and said: "You and the boys fix it, Hawkins—buy some boxing gloves."

"We've got the gloves," said Bill Darby.

"All right, then, whenever you say I'll be ready," said Will. "There's no use of being on the outs, as you boys call it. Let's make an appointment for this fight, and then go ahead and enjoy ourselves till the time of the fight."

"Suits me," sang out Jerry; "that suits me fine, Will."

It surprised me to see Jerry in such good humor now. It seemed that all he cared for was to get a promise out of Will Standish to fight him. But I was yet to learn that my boys had been doing things on their own account while I was away.

. . . . . .

The next afternoon was the time set. When I ar-

rived down at the clubhouse I was surprised to see Roy Dobel drive up with his father's cart and horse. What he was hauling was sawdust. He shouted "Hello!" to me and jumped off the cart, and then, getting in front of the horse, backed the cart around to the side of the clubhouse, where the ground was level. Dick Ferris was there, and Bill Darby, directing where the sawdust was to be dumped, and while they were spreading it over the ground Johnny McLarren came running out of the clubhouse with a bundle of sticks and rope. I sat down on the steps and watched. In a few minutes they had the four sticks set up in holes, and were sliding the ropes through the holes in the sticks. I saw at once that they were making a stage for a boxing show. I was greatly pleased, too, for I knew my boys had been doing some good training while I was in Cuba. But, from the remarks of the boys as they worked on the ropes, I began to gather that Jerry had been training in boxing all winter, and that he had become a very clever boxer. That worried me a little. I felt for Will, whom I had never seen fight. But it was too late now; the date was set, the boys had agreed.

The boys were all feeling fine when they gathered for the regular meeting. Hardly a word was said, but what they all had to laugh and joke, even Jerry talking to Will Standish as though nothing had happened between them. I wondered to myself if Jerry didn't pull this stunt just to show up Will Standish, or rather to show off himself and what he had learned about boxing. Anyway, Dick Ferris asked Will if he knew the rules of boxing, and Will just nodded and smiled. I thought to myself, Will Standish is going to fight fair, and that is his one rule. If you fight fair you know all the rules.

At two o'clock we gathered on the side of the club-

house, where the sawdust ring had been put up. Jerry wore his swimming shirt without sleeves and a pair of dark blue swimming trunks. He wore rubber-soled slippers. When Will Standish came out of the clubhouse he wore a bathing suit of blue and white stripes and a pair of tennis shoes. Bill Darby helped Jerry on with his gloves, while Dick Ferris helped Will. I never saw a bunch of boys pull off a fight like this. It was all so real, as if this thing had been thought out before, and I suppose if Will hadn't come back with me I would have been the one to fight Jerry instead. I believed now that these boys had planned to have a regular fight, and here it was.

Johnny McLarren stood over in the ring to see that the fight was fair. Dick was over in Will's corner, and Bill Darby over in Jerry's corner. Johnny struck a bell, and the fight was on.

The two boys jumped to their feet at the same time and stood watching each other. Will seemed a bit green. He held his gloves up as if he were waiting to turn aside any blow, but Jerry's arms were going like windmills, as though he were warming up to give a mighty punch. I had to laugh, but I stopped short when I saw Jerry's right arm shoot out and catch Will Standish on the neck. Will had tried to duck it, but too late. Jerry sprang back against his ropes as if he expected Will to come and pay him back that blow, but Will stood still. Jerry danced round as if he was aching to get another lick, but didn't care to get too close. Then he took courage.

Yeah, I said, then he took his courage and he took it all. He seemed to believe that Will Standish was never going to light in on him. He thought all it took was for Jerry Moore to go straight over and pound

THE TWO BOYS JUMPED TO THEIR FEET
AT THE SAME TIME, AND STOOD WATCHING EACH OTHER

away on Will Standish. And that might have been so, but Will changed his mind about standing still just then, and Jerry caught something on his chin. He went backward quickly several steps and sat down. Will backed over to his ropes and waited for Jerry to get up. Bill Darby hurried over and helped Jerry to his feet. Jerry rubbed his chin with the back of his glove and started out to finish the fight. It doesn't hurt to start out to do anything, even if you don't succeed. But Jerry's chin ached a little, I guess, and he just set out to give Will two licks for this one, and both were to be delivered on the nose, I think. Anyway, that's where Jerry swung to when he met Will in the middle of the sawdust, but Will knew what Jerry was up to, and when the swing came the head of Will bobbed like a cork on a fishing line, and while Jerry was wondering where Will's head went to so quick something shot up quickly between his arms and landed again on the chin—ouch! Jerry growled, but braced himself after a step backward and came again, his gloves beating down upon Will's head, for Will had slipped and was on one knee. Bill Darby and Dick Ferris helped Will up, and they were too close to fight, and Jerry grabbed Will around the shoulders and hung on for dear life. Will broke away and threw Jerry back, and then it seemed as if Will had gotten his stride, for he sang out: "Come, come on, now!" and he went for Jerry with right and left, but Johnny McLarren decided that the round had gone long enough, and struck the bell again, and hollered "Time!"

They didn't time the round. But it didn't make any difference about that part of the rule. When the bell sounded again Jerry hollered, "Aw, for heaven's sake, give a fella' time to get his breath." Then they

had to make it a little longer, but Jerry was ready when the next bell came.

But Will was on his feet sooner. He was in the middle of the sawdust waiting. And Jerry came with his arms going like a choo-choo train drive. I thought if Jerry would only save all that energy and put it in one good punch he might do something. But Will gave him a merry chase. Whenever Jerry struck Will ducked, and then he would call out "Strike one! Strike two!" and so on. Jerry was getting very sore. Will's tennis shoes must have been slippery, for he went down again on one knee, and Jerry caught him full along the side of the head—a good punch, and Will fell over on his side. But, up again in an instant, he came right back for Jerry, and—

Well, I didn't see that last punch. It was too quick. How Will ever got under those ever-moving arms of Jerry's and gave him that last crack I'm not able to tell you. But there was Jerry sitting on the floor, pulling off his gloves, while Will Standish stood over on his side, leaning against the ropes, breathing hard, but smiling down at the sitting Jerry.

"You're all right, Will," said Jerry; "I didn't think you had it in you."

Will helped Jerry up and they shook hands. "Well," I said to myself, "now that's settled."

III

Harkinson

THINGS were moving fine now. Ever since that boxing match Jerry had a great respect for Will Standish. In fact, they became fast friends. Jerry begged Will to teach him how to throw curves, and, although Will tried to show him how it was done, Jerry could not get the hang of it. I guess a good baseball player has to be born a pitcher or a batter; if it isn't in a fellow he never can learn how. I noticed during several games we had later that although Jerry tried to pitch and to use the same curves that Will had, he never succeeded. When Jerry pitched, the boys pasted the ball right and left, and the fellows who were doing the fielding were kept so busy that they finally yelled to take Jerry out, so they wouldn't have to chase so many batted balls.

These were great vacation days for us. The old swimming hole looked the same as it did in years gone by, and we took a swim every day, usually before noon. The willows hang over the river at the old swimming hole, and it is cool and shady. Will Standish thought this was the greatest treat he ever had. I guess the poor kid never had an old rough swimming hole like ours, and it did him good to get so close to nature.

On the morning following the boxing match I was sitting alone in the little office when Perry popped in.

"Morning, sir," he said with a grin. "Go right ahead with your writing; I don't mean to bother you at all, sir. Just wanted to say hello."

I smiled and said:

"You never bother me, Perry. I haven't seen much of you since I came back. Come in and sit down."

"Oh, no, sir," he said, "the boys wouldn't like it. They don't like it at all, Hawkins. I'm just overseer, you see."

"So the Captain told me," I said to him; "but that doesn't hinder you from sitting down a while and talking, does it?"

Perry smiled. "They think so," he said. "You know they didn't want me in the clubhouse at all, sir. But I begged 'em to let me stay around and promised to keep things clean for 'em, and to look after the clubhouse."

"So they made a bargain with you?"

"That's the way it looks, sir—I mean Hawkins."

"Listen," I said: "Don't say 'sir' to me or anyone around this clubhouse, Perry. Where did you get that habit?"

"My daddy, sir—Hawkins, I mean," he answered; "it's a habit, to be sure."

"What does your daddy do?"

"He is the butler up at Judge Granbery's," replied Perry. "I guess the boys think it isn't just nice to have a butler's son in the club, sir; but, all the same, my daddy's a fine man. I'm proud of him as you are of your'n or any of the other boys."

I stood up and walked over to Perry.

"Shake," I said, holding out my hand. "I'm proud to hear you talk that way. Stick up for your daddy, Perry, no matter what kind of work he does."

Perry Stokes shook my hand warmly and smiled up at me. "Thanks," he said. "You are different than other boys. Why can't they all see things that way?"

"Perry," I said, "if every person in this world saw things the same as his next-door neighbor, we'd never get anywhere. If everybody thought the same thing and believed the same thing, we would never have seen an automobile or an airplane, or anything like that. Because most of the people believed it couldn't be done. Only because a few others thought it could be done and went ahead and tried it we have all the things to-day that make life as wonderful as it is. You can see the point, can't you?"

Perry looked at me with big eyes and open mouth.

"Great Jerusalem!" he exclaimed. "You're smart, you are, Hawkins."

I laughed at him. "Forget it," I said. "I've been doing some thinking, that's all, Perry. When I went across the water in that big ship I began to wonder how any man could figure out how to make so much iron float. I would have believed it could not have been done. And if it had depended upon me there would have been no ships like that. But the man who figured it out thought different. That's just it. Everybody doesn't think in the same way. Just so with the boys here. They've all got ideas of their own. But they'll change. You just wait and see."

Perry had a happy look as he said:

"I wish they were all like you, sir."

"Didn't I tell you to forget that 'sir' when you talk to me? Don't do it, Perry. You're not any different."

He shook his head. "I guess I am, though," he said sadly. "I catch it from all sides. Dick Ferris gave me the dickens for letting Briggen and some of his Pelhams get into the clubhouse one night. But I couldn't

stay down here all night, could I? No, sir. And they came while I was home sleeping and took a pair of brand-new canoe paddles that belonged to Bill Darby. Then the next day when I came down they said I was standing in with the Pelham gang."

"I'm sorry to hear that, Perry," I said; "but I'll look into it and stop it for you. You shall be a member of the club if I have anything to say about it."

"I'll thank you, sure," he said. "You sure are good to me—you and Jerry Moore; the others are different."

At that moment something caught my eye through the window, a figure coming through the tall grass on the hilly ground behind the clubhouse. The next instant—

"Good night!" I said. "Who is that?"

A big overgrown, raggedy, brown-faced boy stood with his arms akimbo looking down at the clubhouse from the rise of ground. On account of the curtains with which the boys had dressed my window, he could not see us, although he was plainly visible to us.

"It's Harkinson," whispered Perry; "he's looking for me, sir."

"Who is he?" I asked. "Who's this Harkinson, Perry?"

"The new Pelham fellow," he replied in a low voice. "I chased him away from here the first day I came. He wouldn't go, and I threw my stick at him and it hit him, and now he's always looking for me."

"What did you do when your stick hit him?"

"I ran, sir. There's no good of staying when a fellow's after you, sir."

"For heaven's sake, drop the 'sir,' Perry, when you talk to me. You're right: there's no use staying when a fellow's after you. And he's coming, too. If he's after

you I suppose you better beat it while you've got the chance, and let me take care of him."

Perry did not wait to say more, but slipped out of the room and was gone. About two minutes later I heard a step on the porch. I waited there in my little office, not making a sound. I heard the shuffle of feet in the clubroom as the newcomer slowly took his time investigating the place. He muttered something to himself once or twice, and I heard him fooling around Lew Hunter's organ, until he must have touched a key and it gave out a note that perhaps frightened him, for I heard him moving away from it. Then his steps moved to the cupboard, and I heard the squeak of the hinges as he opened the cupboard door. He rummaged through it, judging from the sounds, and when I began to wonder if I had not better go out and see what he was about, the curtains parted and he stood before me.

"Good morning," I said. "Is this just a little friendly call or have you business here?"

He looked surprised. I suppose he thought no one was in the clubhouse. But he held something in his right arm that caught my eye, and I knew it had no right to be in the arms of a fellow named Harkinson when it belonged to a fellow named Bill Darby.

"No," I said, before he had time to answer me, "that rifle is not for sale. Bill Darby got it from me for a present, and I got it from a boy named Larry King for a present; but as far as presents go, it's not going to be used for that purpose any more—only for shooting rabbits in the wintertime by us boys."

I stood up and reached over and took the gun out of his arms before he had time to know what I was about to do. He had a bad look, this Harkinson. In

all my time I had never seen a Pelham fellow with a tough face such as this, nor as big a head, or as broad shoulders. He grunted and muttered something in such a low voice that I could not catch the words. He leaned over the desk and pushed his face close to mine, looking steadily in my eyes, as though he wished to impress my face upon his memory—he did not want to forget me. Then his lips curled downward, and, with a sour smile upon his tough face, Harkinson turned and walked out of my office. I listened until his footsteps died out on the path and then I looked at Bill Darby's gun and smiled. Harkinson, whatever he was, did not seem to worry much. He came to take something, I suppose, if he could have gotten away with it, but after finding that it might cause an argument he went away without it. "Belongs to Pelham," I said to myself, "and all Pelhams are alike. Birds of a feather, all of 'em."

I set the gun against the wall and continued my writing.

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I heard the voices of our boys down by the swimming pool as I left the clubhouse and started down the path. From the bushes behind the clubhouse Perry Stokes ran to meet me. "Is he gone, sir?" he asked.

I didn't have time to answer him. I heard a yell—one of those Indian yells the Pelhams used to scare us with—and I turned quickly.

"Where?' I asked. "Where did that yell come from, Perry?"

But Perry had turned before I had spoken and was running as fast as his legs would take him. It sort o' spoiled my opinion of Perry. I had thought he was game, from the looks of him. Now, as I saw him scamper off, I felt myself looking at him through different eyes.

"Yellow," I said. But before long I was to see how badly mistaken I was.

The whole crowd from the river had come running at the sound of that yell. Bill Darby and Jerry Moore led the crowd as they came. "It's Harkinson!" shouted Bill to me. "Harkinson's got Will Standish upon the cliff. Get to him, Hawkins, hurry."

I needed no urging to get to him as soon as I knew. Will Standish—how came he to be up on the cliff? We raced there together, the whole bunch of us. Ah, how I thought as I ran up that cliff path, of the many times we had hurried up the same stones in days past, during those stormy times when Stoner's Boy led us a merry chase. When we were half way up I heard again that yell—that Indian shout, that Pelham trademark. And then we saw.

Link Lambert, the Skinny Guy, lay upon his face on top of the cliff. My heart gave a terrible leap when I looked farther and saw Will Standish hanging by his hands from the edge of the cliff, and the clumsy figure of Harkinson on his knees looking over and taunting him as he hung there. Harkinson held a stick in his hands.

"See how good ye can jump," he was saying, as we came up. "It's only thirty feet to the water, buddy, and it'll do ye good to take a plunge. Go ahead!"

Will Standish turned a white, pleading face up to his tormentor, and struggled to lift himself from his dangerous position. As he did so Harkinson moved back and raised the stick.

"Oh, ye won't do it, eh?" he sneered in his deep voice. "Then I'll have to hammer your grip loose."

He raised his stick to strike the hands of Will Standish as he hung there. Now, mind you, this all happened as

—AND THEN WE SAW LEAP CLEAR OFF THE ROCK."

we were coming up the path. My heart, I say, was in my mouth. I feared the big tough Harkinson would bring his stick down upon those slender fingers and make Will drop. I knew Will could stand a plunge, even from thirty feet, if he were sure to land in deep water, but you never can tell what danger lies below. I know these old cliffs and this old river. And I ran faster so that I drew ahead of the boys that were running with me. I shouted at Harkinson. He started to turn his head toward me.

I say he started. He didn't finish the movement, because something came hurtling through the air—a stick about the size of a cane, and it struck the clumsy Harkinson on the back of the head. He jumped up as though a bee stung him. One glance he turned toward us—just one quick look—and then we saw him leap clear of the rock—clear over the hanging figure of Will Standish, and down, down, disappearing over the edge of the cliff.

Perry Stokes it was who came running from his hiding place. "Did I hit him?" he called. "I was so excited I couldn't aim my cane straight."

"You hit him, all right, Perry," I said, as we bent to lift Will back over the rock. "Good Lord, Will, how in the world did it happen?"

"Link took me to see the caves, and we were coming back," he said, panting hard for his breath, "and we ran into this." He pointed to a contraption that was fixed to a dead tree. "You see it works as a spring. A loop is supposed to catch you as you step on this stone and release the spring. But Link was on that side and stepped back when he felt the stone move. It struck him on the head and he bolted me, and we rolled over together. When I tried to rise, that big

strange fellow was on my neck, rolling me over to the edge, saying he thought a little splash would do me good. My word, but he gave me a jolly good fight there on the edge until my footing let go and I had to grab the edge. You boys came up just in time. How's Link?"

"All right," said Link, as he sat up, rubbing a big lump on his head. "By golly, Hawkins, it knocked me out, didn't it?"

"Put you to sleep, all right," I laughed. "I guess we would have been safer if we had stayed in Cuba, Link, eh, what?"

Link was smiling. He gave me a look that I understood.

"Cuba was never like this," he said. "You get your money's worth here in Kentucky."

"Excitement? Yes," I said.

Well, it was the first real bit of excitement we had had since our return. But it made me think a heap more of one person in the club, namely one overseer who said "sir" to me all the time. You know who I mean.

Harkinson was out of the river and running up the Pelham bank by the time we started down the path. "I've got to keep my eyes open for that fellow," I said to myself, "if he can take leaps like that and get away with it. Harkinson is not a fellow to fool with."

IV

The Camp On the Island

"YES, Hawkins, I'm going to get even with him."

It was Will Standish speaking to me, and he meant that fellow Harkinson, who tried to make him leap into the river from the cliff.

"Better pass it up, Will," I said. "He didn't succeed in making you take the plunge. As it was, he had to leap into the river himself to escape from us."

Will shook his head. "Makes no difference about that," he said. "I would have gone over the cliff if you boys hadn't come up in time. And, what's more, he would have beat my fingers with his club to make me let go my hold. That very intention he had is what made me sore. I've a good notion to take him up there and give him the same kind of treatment he gave me."

I smiled as I glanced at Will's slender fingers and thought of Harkinson.

"He's a great big customer for you to deal with, Will," I said; "you had better think it over. Remember the big head and shoulders that belong to this Harkinson. It wouldn't be an easy task for you to get him up there on the cliff and make him hang from his fingers."

Will smiled back at me. "It isn't always how strong you are that counts," he said, "and the swiftest person doesn't always win a race: remember that, Hawkins, old boy. Leave this whole thing to me. See if I don't make Harkinson swallow his own medicine."

I waved my hands and said:

"All right, just as you will have it. I'd like to save you from harm, though."

"And it may come to such a pass that I'll have to ask you to help me," he said; "but I don't think so. Harkinson has great strength, Hawkins, but he doesn't think. He hasn't much sense. I think I'll pull him down easy."

"Good luck be with you," I said, and I turned back to my desk as Will went out. I felt very uneasy. I had hoped that Will would forget about the trick that Harkinson had played, and that we would steer clear of all trouble from now on. But I could see more trouble looming ahead now. Yet I could not say I feared for Will Standish. All that I had seen of this light-hearted English boy led me to believe that he could take care of himself in anything. But the big bulk of Harkinson made me feel uneasy. Not only his size and strength, but the fact that he was a Pelham, and the Pelhams are tricky, unfair fellows to deal with. I felt just as Will did about getting even with the big bully, but I am not one who goes around hunting trouble. I always let trouble come to me first, and then I try to tackle it as best I know how. However, I guess all boys can't be alike.

Link Lambert overslept himself that morning and came down to the clubhouse very late, long after our meeting was over, and all the other boys down on the river in their canoes. But the Skinny Guy had a smile when he came in. I said: "Hello, Link, you're late," and kept on writing in my new book.

He sat down opposite my desk and watched me write, as though he did not want to talk and bother me. But his silence got on my nerves finally. I looked up.

"Well," I said, "you had better stayed in bed. You're sound asleep, I think."

"Not much," he grinned, rubbing his eyes; "I'm just quiet; I don't want to butt in while you're working. I'll wait till you're finished."

"I'm finished whenever you're ready to talk," I said, laying down my pen. "There's something on your mind, Link. I know you like a book. Let's have it out right away."

"I want to ask you if you'd care," said Link, "if we boys would put up a tent and camp out for a few days."

"Care!" I exclaimed. "As if I had any right to stop you. But Link, where'd we get the tent? There's not enough money left in our tin can to buy a second-hand haircut. The boys spent every cent for flags and fireworks."

"I know," said Link, "but my daddy promised me one, and it's just arrived from Watertown. He says we can camp out if you say so."

"Fine, Link," I said; "your dad's a real fellow. Can we get the tent right away?"

"Sure. It's up in Doc Waters's office waiting for us. Suppose we take it down to Seven Willows Island. You know we had a lot of fun there last summer."

I frowned. We had a lot of fun there, yes; but we had a lot of trouble and scares there, too. But Link saw what was passing through my mind.

"It's all right," he said. "We are bigger than we were last year. We won't be so easily frightened, Hawkins. I think we ought to be able to take care of ourselves."

"All right," I said, "go down and tell the boys. Have them go with you and fetch the tent, and we had

better take some things along. Get some pots and pans and something to cook. Also all the baseball things, and don't forget the fishing tackle. You'll find mine put away in Doc Waters's tin box. Ask Doc if he will let you have that shotgun we took away from Rufe Rogers."

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It was about an hour later when I finished my writing and put my pen and ink away and locked my desk. I put on my hat and went out onto the porch, locking the door, and as I did so Link came up the river path.

"Everything's ready, Hawkins," he said. "I was just coming to get you. We're ready to start for the island."

"How about Doc Waters? Is he going along?"

"No, he said he would tell your daddy where you are going, and it will be all right. He's fixing it for the other fellows, too."

We walked down to the river. A half dozen canoes were being paddled around, each one filled with camping things. The boys hailed us when we came in sight, and I could see they were all as happy as humming birds. In the long, green canoe which belonged to Jerry Moore, and which was the roomiest of all, was packed the white duck which was to make the tent, while floating behind it in the water, tied to the canoe with ropes, were the tent poles. Jerry and Bill Darby had very little room in which to sit and paddle the long boat, but they managed a hard job in the best possible manner. I got in a canoe which Dick Ferris paddled, and Link went in Johnny McLarren's, and then I shouted to Lew Hunter and little Frankie Kane, who

sat in the first canoe, to start ahead, and away we all went to the island.

"Where's Will Standish, Dick?" I asked as we paddled along.

"He's been gone all morning," said Dick. "Perry Stokes went with him. Perry asked to go."

"Ah," I said, and then I fell silent, thinking it over. What scheme had Will in his mind now, taking Perry along with him, I thought to myself. Surely it can be nothing but a plan to catch that bully, Harkinson, as Will had told me he would do. But think as I would I could not figure out just how Will intended to do it. Perhaps Perry, who knew more of Harkinson's habits, would be able to hunt him down, and then leave it to Will to do the rest. If both Will and Perry were after him I knew sure that Harkinson was bound to get what was coming to him.

"Do you think one of us should wait here with a canoe for Will and Perry?" asked Dick. "No," I said, "Doc Waters knows where we are. He will tell Will. Anyway, we will have to return before dark, as we haven't anything to make beds with, and it won't do for us to sleep on the ground without blankets."

We paddled down to the island in about twenty minutes. It was a great treat for the boys to make a camp. How they hustled in unpacking the loads and clearing a space for the tent. They seemed to have brought everything that was needed, too. While some of them were cutting away the high grass and weeds where the tent was to be pitched, the others were opening the packs, spreading the canvas in the sun, digging holes for the tent poles, and getting the stakes and ropes ready to hoist the tent. It made me feel good to see them work like that. I helped all I could, but I

don't count much when it comes to work of that kind. They don't seem to want me to do any of that kind of work, either. They have always had me for their Seckatary, and from what they told me when I came back from Cuba, I was to be their Seckatary forever, and I guess they think that I am doing my share when I do the Seckatary work, although anybody could do it if he knows how to hold a pen and write plain.

Just as Dick gave the word to "Pull away" on the ropes and the tent came up to the top of the poles, I saw a skiff coming toward the shore. It wasn't the skiff that caught my eye as much as the fellow who rowed it. It was Harkinson! He rowed swiftly, and soon the nose of the skiff shoved itself into the muddy bank, and he dropped the oars in the locks and sprang upon the bank. The boys had not seen him, they were so interested in rigging up the tent, and they went right ahead fastening the ropes to the stakes.

"What you call this?" yelled Harkinson, gazing upon us with an angry face. The boys all turned quickly and saw Harkinson.

"What do you think it looks like?" I answered, looking just as angry as he did. "This is a tent, and we intend to camp here for a few days."

"Oh, do you?" sneered Harkinson, in a rough voice. "Well, let me tell you this island is tooken; it belongs to the Pelham boys this season, being as we were the first to come. We got our camp up the other end o' this island, and we don't want no neighbors. See? You guys will make us very happy by pulling up your stakes and beating it back to where you come from. If you ain't gone by to-morrow—well, you'd better be, that's all."

He said no more; turned, rushed back into his skiff,

and was off up the river as fast as his oars would take him. The boys stared at him, not knowing whether to do as he said or not. "Go ahead with the work, boys," I said. "That bully can't frighten us away. We know the Pelham fellows. They were the same last year. Dick, you stay here and see that the tent is finished and fastened down tight. Then you better take everything else back with you when you come home. I'll take Lew Hunter along with me and we will follow this Harkinson to see what mischief he might be up to."

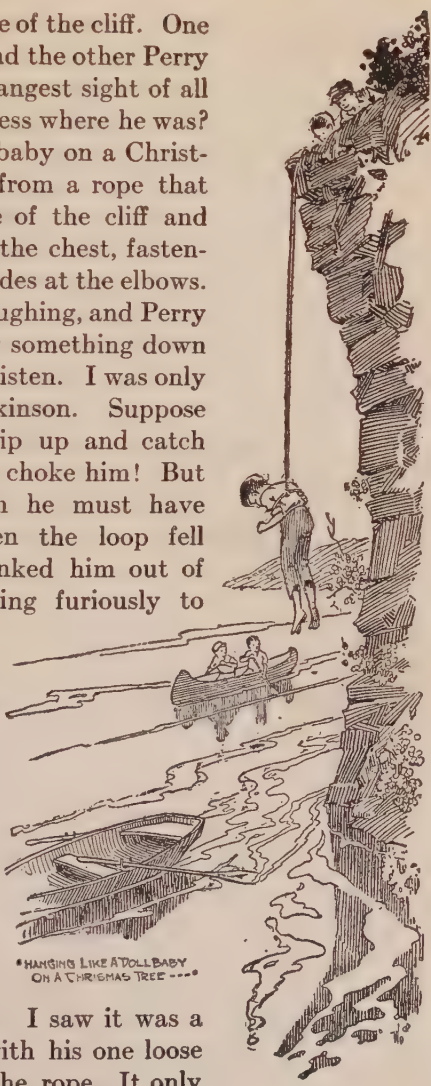
Lew jumped into the canoe with me, and I waited and watched through the bushes until I had seen the skiff turn the upper bend of the river. Then we started paddling slowly, as I did not want to get too close to Harkinson, or have him think he was being followed. He faced us as he rowed the skiff, but he did not seem to watch us particularly. I supposed he just imagined we were coming back because he had told us to clear off the island. But when we turned the bend and first came into view of the skiff he seemed not to notice us at all. Lew Hunter said he thought Harkinson was going back to get the Pelham fellows to chase us off the island. Then all of a sudden—

But wait, I'm going too fast. We had paddled almost up to our landing place at the home bank, when Lew, who was paddling in front suddenly stopped and exclaimed:

"Good Lord, where did he go?"

I quickly turned my gaze upon the skiff ahead of us. It was empty. The oars were lying idle in the oarlocks and the skiff was drifting out into the current. We were just passing the cliffs, and our canoe was close to the rocky sides. I heard a shout from the top of the cliff, and we both looked up together. Two heads were

peeping over the edge of the cliff. One was Will Standish and the other Perry Stokes. But the strangest sight of all was Harkinson. Guess where he was? Hanging like a doll baby on a Christmas tree—hanging from a rope that came over the edge of the cliff and caught him around the chest, fastening his arms to his sides at the elbows. Will Standish was laughing, and Perry Stokes was shouting something down to us—but I didn't listen. I was only worried about Harkinson. Suppose that rope should slip up and catch around his neck and choke him! But Harkinson, although he must have been surprised when the loop fell around him and yanked him out of his skiff, was working furiously to get free from his bonds, and succeeded in getting one arm out, and then the boys up on top began to pull him up—but it was too late; they had let the fish nibble too long, and they lost it. For Harkinson snatched something bright from his belt. I saw it was a shining knife, and with his one loose arm he slashed at the rope. It only



"HANGING LIKE A DOLL BABY ON A CHRISMAS TREE ----"

took a second, and it happened too quickly for all of us. The only thing I can remember now is the loud splash as Harkinson came falling plump into the river not five feet from our canoe. Oh, boy! how Lew and I worked to keep the canoe right side up in all that churning water! Harkinson disappeared under the water like a lump of lead, and we waited anxiously for him to come up, but we were fooled, for he must have swum at least fifty feet upstream before his head came bobbing up. He lifted himself clear of the water for a second and shook his fist at the two boys on top of the cliff, then he swam a bit further and climbed out onto the shore. In two shakes of a rabbit's tail he was gone through the green bushes on the Pelham side.

We waited there for Will and Perry, and they came down in a few minutes, laughing and happy. "I told you I'd get even with him," said Will to me. "Yes," I said, "but one dive more or less don't mean anything to Harkinson. He seems to like high dives into the water, Will. But I believe you have just made matters worse. You'd better look out for his next move now. Harkinson is a pretty tough customer."

Will laughed. "Oh, all right, Hawkins," he said, "you don't think I am equal to him, I suppose. But he only tricked me the day I wasn't looking for anything of that kind. Let him try another stunt like that. If I get licked then, why I'll admit he's too much for me."

Somehow I couldn't believe that Harkinson would get the best of Will Standish any more. The way they yanked the big Pelham fellow out of his skiff was a clever thing. They had been watching there on the cliff all day, Will and Perry, for just such a chance.

They had seen Harkinson go down in his skiff, and were ready with their loop when he came back. And Harkinson never will forget the jolt he got when he was jerked up and his skiff drifted away from under him.

We all had a good laugh about it when the other boys came back that evening.

V

The Woodchoppers

WE HELD our meeting in the clubhouse early next morning before going down to our camp on the island. Doc Waters had promised us blankets in which to sleep, and Johnny McLarren and Bill Darby had gone for a basketful of canned goods and provisions for our meals while we lived in the tent. Lew Hunter had a big cardboard box under his arm when he came into the clubhouse, and I asked him what he was taking along to the island with him.

"Music," he said, smiling. "We've got to have some singing. The preacher gave it to me for my birthday. Want to see it?"

He quickly untied the string and took off the lid of the box. It was a fancy accordion.

"Good night!" I said. "Nobody will get any sleep in the camp as long as that doodlesack stays there."

"Why," he said, "music is good for you. I can play it. Want to hear me?"

"No, thanks; not just now, Lew. We will try it out down on the island. I didn't mean to say you couldn't play it. But you know our fellows. As soon as you lay that thing down one of the boys will be trying it to see how it works. And what's worse than noise from an instrument when it falls into the hands of a fellow who doesn't know how to play it?"

"I'll take care of that," said Lew.

Doc Waters arrived with the blankets in his automobile, and we transferred them to the canoes. The

boys were anxious to be off, and so I told Lew Hunter and Jerry Moore to boss the trip and start ahead of me. "I will wait for Johnny and Bill," I said.

After they had gone Doc came into my little office with me and sat down while I finished writing about the meeting and checking up the dues.

"Are you coming along, Doc?" I asked.

"I guess not now, Hawkins," he said; "although the Lord knows I'd like nothing better than to spend a few days with you boys on the island. But I've got some matters to attend to in town for Link's people. I've just settled for the place down in Kentucky. I guess you boys will say good-bye to Link pretty soon."

I felt a lump rise in my throat when he said that. I couldn't help it. I knew Link was no longer one of us. He had much to do to make up for lost time, for the days his daddy had let him wander around without any schooling. His folks were rich now. Link simply could not be one of us any longer. Gosh, how I wished we could have stayed the same bunch of happy youngsters that we were a couple of years ago! But then that was selfish wishing, for in that case Link would not have found his mother, nor would his mother have been rescued from the sufferings she had been enduring for so many years.

"Yep," I said, "I guess we will have to lose him, Doc. But I hate to see him go. I've been with him so long, Doc, that he is a sort of brother to me."

"But he won't be far away, and you can visit him," said Doc; "in fact, I don't think Link will be able to remain away from here very long. He will be popping up here every once in a while. He has a sort of a restless nature. He likes to wander. You will remember how

he was when you first met him—always off somewhere and gone for days at a time."

"I'd like to bring back the old days," I said dreamily, looking up at the ceiling.

"I want you to go with him when they start for their new home," said Doc, rising and putting on his hat. "By the way, I received a fine letter from Uncle Lucio. He sends you his love."

"Dear old Lucio," I smiled. "Lord, how I liked that man, Doc. Write to him that I want to see him up here soon. Tell him we will show him a fine time."

"Good-by," said Doc. "I'll write that sure." Then, turning, he said in a low tone: "About that camp: You know I'll depend upon you to keep order."

I saluted him and answered: "Righto. Depend upon me. I'll take the blame for anything that goes wrong. I've got faith in my boys now, Doc, more than I ever had before."

Doc nodded. "I can trust you, Hawkins," he said. "You know that the parents of these youngsters all blame me if anything goes wrong. I'm always the one begging them to let the kids go and have a good time. I guess I ought to have better sense."

I grasped Doc's hand. "You've been a prince to us, Doc," I said warmly. "You're just the kind of a man boys are looking for; but very few of them find one like you."

Doc laughed his funny little laugh. "Same old Hawkins," he said. "You like to jolly a person. Well, I'll leave it to you. I want to see you boys have all the fun you can while you are boys. I missed most of it when I was a kid. So I'm getting my fun now with you boys. I guess I'm just a boy myself; never will grow up; and, what's more, if growing up means to keep

away from all these things that makes boys have a good time, I don't want to grow up."

He walked quickly up the path toward the main road. I watched him with a smile until the high grass shut out the view. What a fine man old Doc Waters was! Boys, I'll never forget Doc Waters, even if I grow to be a wrinkled old man with a beard down to my knees.

Now I went back into my little office and wished Bill and Johnny would hurry and come soon. I admit I was anxious to get to our camp. Not that I expected to have such a fine time, but I did want to be near them to see that nothing happened. The thought of Harkinson came back to me so often that I grew nervous. Harkinson had warned us—Harkinson was a Pelham.

Just then I felt relieved, for I heard steps on the porch and heard voices which I immediately took for Bill and Johnny. "It's about time," I called out.

And then the curtains parted—and I looked up. Standing there was Harold Court and his brother Oliver, the twins.

"Hawkins!" shouted Harold, "dear old Hawkins. Well this is a surprise. Glad to see you, old boy," and he clapped his left hand upon my shoulder and shook my hand with his right. Oliver, too, came over quickly and grabbed my hand, both of them talking at the same time.

"Surprise?" I said. "You're not nearly so surprised as I am. Where in the world did you twins come from? I haven't seen you since last summer about this time. You remember when Stoner's Boy was making it hot for us around here?"

Harold laughed. "I'll never forget those days," he said. "We were back here at Christmas, but you were

down in Cuba then. We missed you awfully on Christmas Eve. It didn't seem like Christmas without you."

"Thanks," I said; "but you can't imagine how lonesome I was down there in Cuba on Christmas Eve. I had to forget it was Christmas time; every time I thought about it it made me blue."

"Well, we are glad to see you back with us," said Oliver. "We thought we would surprise the boys this year, and so we didn't let them know when we were coming back. We went right to our uncle's home in Philadelphia as soon as school let out, and we stayed there till about a week ago. We stopped off at a few places on our route and arrived home last night."

"Well," I said, "I'd been wondering about you, and asked Dick Ferris, and he said you two were going to spend the whole summer in Philadelphia. But I'm glad you changed your minds."

"You know we couldn't stay away all summer," said Harold. "What's new? Has anything ever been heard of Stoner's Boy?"

I shook my head. "No," I said, slowly; "never since he fell down the pit in the cave. We found the big bat that caused him to fall. I suppose you heard how it was killed by Robby Hood, a boy from Watertown who used to come down here to play with us?"

"Yes," said Harold, "we heard about that. But I suppose it is best for us now; it is not nice to have somebody laying for the boys all the time."

I smiled. "Oh, I don't know," I said. "It gives the boys something to think about. It keeps them out of fighting amongst themselves. I wouldn't mind if some other fellow took a notion to hit our trail. I think it's sport in a way."

Harold sat down and leaned across the desk toward me.

"Ah," he said, "I believe your trip to Cuba has made you a bit reckless, Hawkins. But I think I can promise you some sport, as you call it. We spent yesterday at Watertown. Oliver insisted upon seeing the water front down there, where we used to land on our trips up from here. So we took a trip down there and stopped in a little store on our way back to get a drink. While we sat at a table we heard three boys talking at a table next to us. They talked low, but I heard. And one of them mentioned you. He called you 'that Hawkins fella,' and he also spoke of a light-haired boy whose name he didn't know. He said he would get you."

"What else did he say?" I asked.

"We paid our bill and left. I don't know whether it means anything or not. The fellow who spoke your name looked like a bad egg."

"What did he look like?"

"Oh, a peculiar-looking chap with long arms and a big head—"

"Harkinson," I said; "Harkinson it was. He has been here once or twice. If you boys will come with me I would like to take you to the island. We have a camp there."

"Glad to go," said Harold. "I had a notion that you had put up a tent around here some place."

So I did not wait for Bill and Johnny. We took one of the canoes and started for the island. I had a worrisome idea that Harkinson might be up to mischief, and I was anxious to be with my boys at the camp. As we went I related to the twins the experience we had had with Harkinson.

. . . . . .

What a pretty sight it was—that little camp on the south bank of the island. While the other boys were greeting the twins, whom they had not seen for a long time, I stood off a distance and gave it all the once over. The white tent set in a clearing in the midst of green trees and bushes was an inviting place; the canoes, some moored to saplings and others upside down on the bank; the little stove with its sorry-looking smoke-stack, which sent a thin stream of smoke skyward; the little square of silk with the stars and stripes flying from the center pole, and over all the song of the million birds that lived in the treetops roundabout. Yeah, this was a fine place for vacation and a rest.

But shucks! The minute I think of rest the word Pelham pops into my mind. How is anyone going to have rest and quiet where Pelham fellows roam? Harkinson! Something about that fellow made me worry. I did not trust him.

"Hawkins," sang out Jerry Moore, "are you going to stand there dreaming all day? How about a game of ball?"

I excused myself, but I told them to go ahead and play. There was plenty of time till the lunch hour. Harold came over to me as the other boys trotted away with the balls and bats.

"Have you an idea?" he asked me.

"You mean about Harkinson?"

"Yes. He is here. You can bet your bottom dime on that. Listen!" A distant sound came to our ears. It was the sound of an ax falling upon wood. "Wood-choppers," said Harold.

"It's Harkinson," said I. "Come on."

Together we threaded our way through the thick wild growth and sped toward the sound of the wood-

chopping. The distance was greater than it seemed when first we heard the sound. But at length we stopped short and peered through the foliage. Pelham was there—not fifty feet from us—all of Pelham as I knew it before I left for Cuba. There was Briggen, the leader, and Dave Burns and Ham Gardner, and all the others of less importance, chopping, chopping. But not Harkinson! I quickly passed from one face to another, and I felt relieved to know that Harkinson was not there. Down came a medium-sized tree with a crash. The choppers moved at once to another and began to chop. The other Pelhams lifted the fallen tree and began to strip it of its branches. Then I noticed something built well back into the wildwood that had skipped my eye —a sort of fortress built of newly chopped logs—a stockade, as it were, like the old settlers used to build to guard against the Indians. I noticed Harold sizing up the fortress with as much interest as I had. Then he whispered to me:

"The Pelhams intend to hold their own. They will never be driven out of that stronghold. Oh, look, Hawkins. There he is, by George!"

I had seen him. Even before Harold spoke I had seen him. Harkinson had risen from behind the stockade and was standing on top of the highest log.

"Git bigger trees," he shouted, pointing to the choppers. "What you cutting the small ones for? Git bigger trees."

That harsh voice! Those long arms that moved like windmills! That big head topped with tangled hair, set squarely upon those heavy shoulders, gave Harkinson the appearance of a great monkey, and the background of forest made it seem all the more so. Something about him made me fear. I felt the same

trembling now as I felt that midnight in Cuba when I saw the greenish face of old Elam looking through my window.

"Come," I whispered, taking Harold's arm. Silently we slipped back to our camp and sat down by the side of the river.

"Well," said Harold, "it's either go back at once or stay here and fight the Pelhams. Do you think we had better break camp, Hawkins, or would you wait and see what happens?"

"You don't know me, Harold," I said. "There's no going back in me. I'm for always going forward. I'll stay. But I'm afraid of that Harkinson—I'll admit it to you."

Harold remained silent a while. Only the sound of our boys playing ball a short distance away came to our ears—that and the chopping, and the occasional fall of a tree in the other direction where the woodchoppers were still at it.

"He's a big fellow, all right," said Harold; "but it isn't his size that scares me. What is it, Hawkins?"

"I don't know," I said. "Perhaps we shall find out soon enough."

Which we did.

VI

Singing by the Campfire

FOR two days we had rest and quiet in our camp on the island. We did not move far from our tent, only going to the clearing for our ball games, and using a little pool nearby for our swimming. Doc Waters came down the second day and umpired a game of ball for us and helped Roy Dobel cook our meals. Roy is the best cook in our club. He knows how to make all kinds of meals. I suppose if we didn't have Roy Dobel most of us would be pretty hungry at times, for I don't think there is another boy in the bunch who can do more than boil water.

Our boys did not go near the Pelham camp on the north end of the island. I laid down the rules as soon as I found out that the Pelhams were camped there. I told them that the first boy who went away from our camp without leave would be sent back home, and maybe thrown out of the club altogether. It isn't nice to say such things to boys like mine, but just think what trouble they might have gotten into if they did wander into the Pelham camp. Sometimes we must make rules that seem awfully harsh because it is one way to keep peace and happiness. Those rules which seem hardest are always those which do the most good for us.

I never enjoyed a camp so much as I did this one. The boys were all so jolly and full of fun, and Doc Waters seemed like one of the boys, too. After supper the first night Lew Hunter brought out his accordion and began to play some tunes. At first, when the boys

saw him with that funny old music box, they laughed and made fun of it. But Lew just smiled and took everything good natured. And when he started to play—say, you just ought to have seen those fellows change their mind. Lew is a born musician. I don't think there is any kind of an instrument he can't play, unless it is a horn. I never heard him play a trombone, nor a cornet, nor a clarinet. But I think more of him for that, because I never thought much of such music, which sounds more like noise to me. But here he was playing an old accordion, and it sounded like an organ—just as soft and sweet. He struck up a few bars first just to see how the old thing was tuned, I guess, and then, as all the fellows stopped their laughing and it began to be quiet, except for the noise of the frogs and the crickets, Lew swung into the good old tune of "'Way Down Upon the Swanee River," and he played it soft and slow, just as pretty as if he had practiced it for a month, which I know he had not. The boys sat there, some with their elbows on their knees and their chins in their hands, looking at Lew as he worked the accordion back and forth and made it produce such sweet music. Doc Waters was sitting in the rear, with his knee clasped in his folded hands, swinging back and forth in time to the music and smiling as if it made him happy. I thought then of the awful times Doc and I and Skinny Link had gone through just a couple of months ago, and I did not wonder that the Swanee River song brought back to mind how happy we all were to get back to our own river again, with our own folks, and where we could live in peace and safety.

Lew brought the song to an end with a crash of harmony—you know what I mean—a lot of chords. Lew knows how to do that to make it sound fine. I

think it brought the boys into a singing mood, for when next he started playing, and it was "Old Kentucky Home," all of the fellows began to sing. Say, if you want to hear something fine, just listen to a bunch of boys singing on a clear night in a woods somewhere. And our boys know how to sing, thanks to the teaching of Lew Hunter himself. He has them all separated into sopranos, altos, tenors, and bass, and each boy knows what part Lew wants him to sing. I remember when Lew first began teaching our boys singing the fellows didn't know what soprano or alto meant. So Lew just called the sporano singers the "first part," and the alto singers the "second part," and the others didn't come in until later. Lew Hunter was the only tenor in our crowd till Dick Ferris came back from the Pelham side, and then Lew took him for a partner. And this night, as we sat there singing "Old Kentucky Home," good old Doc Waters joined in, and Doc's voice is as low as any voice can be, so I know that's bass. So you can imagine how fine it sounded—singing there with only the moon as our audience.

When the singing ended I thought I heard a sound in the gloom behind the bushes that grow in thickness around our camp. I didn't say anything about it, not even to Harold, but when I noticed Harold look around after the next song ended I began to suspect that somebody was hiding there. However, when Doc called "Bed Time," we all turned into the tent and took our cots without a word, and as one of our camp rules is "no speaking" after the lights are out, it was not long before all of us were sound asleep.

You wonder why I tell you so much about our singing? Well, it may be because I am fond of it myself. It seems to do me a lot of good to hear good singing. It

"WAY DOWN UPON THE SWANEE RIVER"

seems to stir up the good that is in a fellow but seldom is known; it seems to wake up a feeling of kindness and tenderness; it makes a fellow's thoughts always go back to home and those he loves somehow; it makes you forget bad things and think of good things. God knew, when he made us, just what singing was to be for. You know it makes you think.

But that isn't why I am writing so much about our singing. No, no, if that was all there was to it I would pass over it and go ahead with my story, for the story is what you want. But our singing had a lot to do with our story, as you shall see.

The next morning we were up with the birds, as usual. We had a swim while Roy and Doc prepared breakfast, and after breakfast we held a little meeting, in which I told the boys once more how important it was to stick close to the camp and not stray away from it at all. Then the usual ball game began in the clearing, and Harold stayed in the tent to talk to me.

"You heard it last night, Hawkins?" he said. "I saw you look into the shadows once."

"Yes," I said. "Spies from the Pelham camp."

"Exactly," said Harold. "We are being watched. I don't suppose we ought to sit here like dummies and wait for something to happen."

"No," I said, "I guess we should go hunting for trouble before it comes."

"You've got me wrong," said Harold. "I don't propose to be caught unaware, that's all. I think we should do as much spy work as the Pelhams. It's great sport, in a way, and you say you are looking for sport. What do you say to a tramp up the island and wait there until the Pelhams clear out, then we can inspect their camp and see what Harkinson is up to?"

"Don't mention that fellow's name to me," I said; "he gets on my nerves. But I guess you are right. Don't you think, though, we should take a few others along? It's sort o' scarey, just we two, against a gang like that."

"It would not be bad," said Harold, "to take one or two others into our confidence. We might need them. Whom do you suggest?"

"Link, for one," I answered. "The Skinny Guy is getting back into shape again since his return from Cuba. You know what a good spy Link is, and then there is that new fellow I introduced you to—Will Standish. He's a valuable help, I can tell you. I found that out many times in Cuba.

"I liked his looks the minute I met him," said Harold; "all right, we four will do. Then I would suggest that you appoint two or three boys to sentry duty here at the camp. Somebody should be on the lookout all the time. One should be on watch on the river bank and another back in the woods there."

"All right," I said, "let your brother Oliver have the river. I'll get Bill Darby to watch the rear of the camp. What else?"

Harold had nothing more to suggest. We immediately called Link and Will Standish and told them they were going with us. Then we gave Oliver and Bill Darby instructions as to what we wanted them to do while we were away, which they were only too glad to do.

We struck out, the four of us, through the island in the direction of the Pelham camp. The wood-chopping had stopped, and I imagined that the Pelhams had now enough logs to build their stockade. When we arrived at the place we were surprised at the great number of trees the Pelhams had cut down.

But the stockade was no further completed than when we saw it last. Not a single Pelham was in sight. I imagined that they had given up their idea and deserted the island. We felt encouraged by the lonesomeness of the place, and walked boldly up to the pile of logs that had been stored in front of the half-built fortress.

As we neared it a sound from the interior caused us to stop short. The next instant a boy stood in the doorway of the half-finished stockade. I knew him at once. It was Ham Gardner, one of the leading Pelhams. I expected to see all of them come out behind him, thinking that they had seen us and were hiding. But only Ham stepped forth. He smiled a bit at me, and I heard him murmur "Hawkins" under his breath.

"Hello, Ham," I said. "Where's the gang?"

"Don't know," he said in a low voice. "What y' want here?"

"Just want to pay a friendly visit," I said. "What's the log house for?"

"Don't know," he said.

"Did Briggen tell you to say that?" I said. "I suppose you are to say nothing but 'don't know.' Am I right?"

Ham shifted from one foot to the other and looked at Will Standish.

"Say," he said at length, "you fellows must get out of yere right away. They'll be back soon, and if they see me I'll catch it for talking to you."

"All right, Ham," I said, "you know me. I always helped you out whenever I could."

Ham nodded. "Yeah, that's all right, Hawkins," he said. "I ain't got nothin' agin you personal, but I got to follow orders. You'll have to cl'ar out."

I walked closer and looked into Ham's simple face. "Listen," I said: "I know you're under orders, and I think maybe the Pelhams are kind o' hard on you, Ham, leaving you behind when they go on their expeditions. Where are they? Spying on our camp?"

Ham shook his head. "No," he said, "shootin' ducks for dinner. Lots of 'em on the other side o' the island,"

"Tell me just this, Ham," I said, "and I won't give you away. Why didn't Harkinson attack our camp before this? Surely you know the plans. He was supposed to chase us off as soon as we came. We've been here three days now and we've not seen sight o' him. Now, why?"

Ham did not move. Nor did he open his mouth. Harold had gone over to the pile of logs and was writing something down in a little book. When Ham would not answer my questions I saw that we could get no information out of him, so I walked over to Harold. He tore the page out of the book on which he had written, and asked if I had a pin. I told him no, but I had a couple of tacks in my coat pocket. "That will do," he said, and I handed him two. With a stone he tacked the page from his notebook onto the log so that it would not come off. Then, before I knew what he intended doing, he had shoved the log off the pile, and it went tumbling down into the river. For a moment it danced around in the water, and then started floating with the current down toward our end of the island.

"For heaven's sake, Harold," I exclaimed, "matters are bad enough without giving the Pelhams more reasons to come after us."

Harold smiled. "We can use the logs," he said, "and it will keep the Pelhams busy chopping others

until we get a fence built around our camp. Here go the rest. I wrote a note on the first one to Oliver. He will catch them as they pass the camp."

Ham Gardner watched us sullenly. He said not a word and made no move to stop the log-rolling. Will Standish and Link helped Harold with the pile until the last log was in the water floating toward our camp. Then a sound came to our ears. How I remember that sound, and how it startled me that day! It was the sound of a horn, a horn I had heard many times, but not since the days of Stoner's boy. Yes, I could not be mistaken. It was Stoner's horn. And the minute I heard it I knew that it was Harkinson who blew that blast upon it. No other boy around here could make you think of Stoner as Harkinson could. Now, I knew that Harkinson had known Stoner—he had been one of Stoner's gang.

Ham Gardner heard it as quickly, and darted a quick glance at me and went inside the log house.

We did not stop to ponder over it then and there. We flew as fast as our legs could carry us and as quickly as we could dodge through that thick woods. I wondered after we had run quite a distance, why we ran. I thought then that because we had thrown the logs into the river we had been afraid to face the Pelhams when they would discover it. But that wasn't the reason. The reason was that all of us had seen Harkinson once—and once seen he was a fellow to be afraid of forever after. Will Standish alone acted as though he would wait and meet his former foe again, but when we three started running he followed.

But we had been tricked somehow. For suddenly we found ourselves facing a group of Pelhams, headed by the ungainly Harkinson. He carried a rifle in the

hollow of his arm, and Briggen, the Pelham leader, who walked directly behind him, had a few wild ducks strung over his shoulder. The four of us stopped short. Harkinson's gleaming eyes were upon us and he had an ugly smile upon his broad face.

"Sneaks," he said in a low, harsh voice; "you're a fine bunch of sneaks. I've a notion to punch your noses red just for luck. Don't be afraid. I won't do it. I've got other ideas. Look up, you with the tow head. You thought you did a smart trick when you threw your lasso over my shoulders and hauled me out of my boat, didn't you? Well, we will even up that score yet. Look at me."

I saw Will Standish grow furiously angry at these taunting words, and his fists clenched. I expected to see him step up and strike Harkinson for that taunt. But he did not move. And then I did not wonder much myself at it. Somehow or other I did not feel able to move. This fellow Harkinson's eyes held me as though I were enchanted. The four of us stood there as powerless to do anything as if we had been made of stone. Fear, you call it? Well, maybe so. I don't know. All that I know is that somehow I did not feel like moving. All I wanted to do was to keep my eye on this fellow Harkinson and watch him as close as I would a snake that was looking hard at me from the grass.

"I saved you to-day," Harkinson was saying, "and I saved you the day before. Your camp still stands on the south bank because I let it stand. But you better keep on singing every night if you want it to stay standing where it is. Sing! Yes, you heard me. It was only that that saved you. And I'm goin' to let you go again to-day, but I'm thinking you'll have to sing harder

than ever from now on if you want to see that pretty white tent stay in that pretty spot where you have pitched it. Now go!"

And all the time we were standing there as though we had come for no other reason than to hear him preach to us. His eyes, I say, were on us like cat's eyes from the very first moment we met him, and as he ordered us to go he followed us with those narrow eyes until we had passed him. The Pelham fellows fell back and formed a passage for us as we started, and not a sound came from their lips. Something funny had come over Pelham. They no longer jeered us when they had us in their grip. What had this Harkinson done to change them so?

We arrived at the camp just as Doc Waters and Oliver were fastening the last log that had come down. Oliver had caught sight of the first one with the note, and had followed instructions. Bill Darby reported that he had seen a number of Pelham flatboats and skiffs pull around the other side of the island. Then we went inside the tent and talked it over.

"That fellow's got me buffaloed, Hawkins," said Will Standish to me. "I never could whip him if I had to meet him face to face. Did you notice his eyes?"

"I felt the same way," said Harold quietly. "He seems to impress me as being of great strength or something. I knew I was beaten when we faced him in the woods there."

"Go easy," I said. "Give me time to think. But one thing is certain, boys: We must sing like the deuce to-night."

Which we did.

VII

Ham Gardner's Tip

MUCH to my surprise, several days passed without any sign that Harkinson and the Pelham boys intended to drive us away from our island camp. To be sure we sang every night; something told me that the singing was holding them back. Harkinson had some soft spot in his hard old heart for good singing. I know it was he who came sneaking down to our camp every night and hid in the bushes beyond while we sang to the tunes Lew Hunter played on his accordion. Of course, he had come to spy upon us, but with his spying he never made an attack. It was the singing, you see. It sort o' held him back. No matter how much he disliked to have us there, he did not bother us as long as he heard the singing in our camp every night. You see, it's a funny world we live in.

But I knew it couldn't last. I knew something would happen soon that would set loose all of Harkinson's meanness and upset our camp like a cyclone. The fact that we had thrown all of the logs into the river and used them for our own camp was enough to cause them to seek revenge upon us. And I knew it would come. Sooner or later we would have to give them a receipt for those logs.

Harold and I took turn about with Will and Link in going down to the Pelham camp to spy around. But all that we could learn without getting close enough to be seen was that they had decided to finish the building of their log house and the stockade around it. Evi-

dently they intended to make a safe retreating place for themselves before they began their attacks upon us. And with that same idea in mind I set my boys tc work with the logs Harold had floated down from the Pelham camp, and a hundred yards beyond our camp we had a solid stockade fence built in a few days' time that would keep us as safely from harm as would the Pelham's fortress. Only one door did we make in the log fence, and there we had a sentry on duty all day long. At night time we locked it inside with three good-sized padlocks, and Jerry Moore had charge of the keys. The log fence was like a half-circle extending from one side of the island across to the water line on the other side. The only way that they could enter the camp now was from the river, and Oliver and Bill Darby took turns about watching it.

Now, it was about the fourth night, as we sat outside the tent singing, that I felt Harold touch my arm, and I followed him quietly into the shadows behind the campfire. The other boys did not notice we had left.

"He's here again," whispered Harold to me. "He is watching you and me this very minute. I'm not going to stand it any longer. I'm tired of being watched every night. I'm for putting a stop to it."

"How did he get in?" I asked. "The gate is locked."

"Over the fence," whispered Harold. "Nothing can stop him. He climbs like a cat."

"Well, what will you do? Fight him?"

Harold hesitated a moment and looked at me puzzled. The next minute there came a sound like the hiss of a snake, and something thin and round shot out above our heads as I yelled, "Look out! Duck it!"

Harold ducked just in time. The noise of my yelling brought the singing to an end, and the other boys

came running up to us. Harold jumped up and ran after a figure darting away in the shadow of the bushes. I sped after him, and as I came up to the fence I saw him standing there looking up, as something gray and like a snake went wriggling over the top of the stockade.

"What was it?" I asked.

"A rope," answered Harold, with a short laugh. "He tried to lasso me, I think. Must have taken me for Will Standish. I guess he wants to pay Link back and show him he can do as much with a lasso as Will can."

"Careful, boys," broke in Doc Waters, as he ran up at the head of the other boys, "it's too dark out this way. Better come back."

But Harold was scaling the stockade even as quickly as Harkinson had done it, and before Doc's last word was said Harold had jumped over. Doc ordered Jerry to unlock the gate at once. "The boy's foolish to go out alone in the dark," he said.

Jerry quickly opened the gate and we ran out, following Doc Waters. It is dark outside the stockade fence, for, although a moon was shining, the branches of the trees grow close together, shutting out the moonlight. I called to Harold as we ran, but no answer came. I began to grow afraid that he had fallen into some trick of the fellow Harkinson's, and I was greatly relieved when we came up to him where he stood in a clear part of the island.

"He beats me," Harold was saying as we came up. "He's gone. Did you ever know a fellow to get away so easily? I saw him just a minute before I stopped here. He seemed to vanish all of a sudden."

Doc scolded Harold for being so foolish as to run after Harkinson, and made us all turn about quickly

and return to the camp, where we said little more, but went to our cots in the tent and to sleep.

The following day Doc Waters said he had to go to town, and I told him he could go with the canoe I intended sending to town for groceries. Doc said I had better send two boys for it, so I told Johnny McLarren and Perry Stokes to go. It was just after breakfast when Doc and the two boys started. Doc made me promise to keep the boys close to the tent and to see that none of them ran any risk outside the stockade fence.

So, after we were alone, I told the boys that if they cared to play ball they could play water baseball down in the little pool near one end of our stockade fence. It was really a great game; it was new to the boys, and after they got started they said they liked it as well as baseball. I think they spent the whole morning in the water, and came out only for lunch and a rest, after which they went back for another game or two.

I was sitting in the tent writing about the night before when in came Harold and the Skinny Guy. "Hawkins," said Harold, "I've a notion to go and find out how Harkinson got away last night. It was too dark last night, and Doc wouldn't listen to reason. But let's go now and have a look."

I slipped old Rufe Rogers's shotgun under my arm as I went with Harold and Link. Bill Darby was on sentry duty at the gate, and I told him to watch close, and if he saw us come running to hold the gate wide open for us and slam it tight as soon as we passed through, which he promised to do.

We did not have to walk far to reach the place where Harold lost track of Harkinson the night before. And

as soon as we reached it Link told us how Harkinson disappeared.

"Ah," he said, "I see. Look, Hawkins. It's Stoner's old disappearing place. Remember it now?"

Remember it I did. The old rotten tree stump stood before us. Even as I looked into its hollow trunk I thought of the day long ago when I heard Stoner's running footsteps sounding in the tunnel underneath—and the time Long Tom caught Sanders, a little kid who belonged to Stoner's gang and who was showing us that secret entrance.

"Yes," I said, "I remember it, Link. I was afraid of this. I had a notion that Harkinson was one of Stoner's fellows. He knows all of his master's old tricks and hiding places. But I believe he is ten times worse than Stoner ever could be. We will have to be mighty careful, boys. None need to be surprised if we find ourselves in that tunnel some day, tied hand and foot, and aching for a drink of water or a bite of a ham sandwich."

Harold stood looking into the old hollow tree as though it fascinated him.

"Pretty slick," he said, with a smile. "I'll give him credit. He thought we would have forgotten it by this time."

"Look," said Link, "there is a door—see, a trapdoor down in the bottom of this hollow tree. They have it locked, I guess, so nobody can get in after they go down there. They would be safe from anybody, once they get inside."

"Beat it!" whispered Harold. "Somebody is under that trap door."

Sounds of a bolt being shoved in a rusty latch came from beneath the door in the hollow stump. Together

we leaped away into the bushes that ringed in the clearing. There we crouched and waited. Soon we saw the top of a shaggy head pop up in the hollow tree. The next minute I expected to see Harkinson come out of that hole, but it wasn't; no, it was Ham Gardner, of the Pelhams. He stood up and turned around to the north end, where the Pelham camp was located, and

shook his fist in that direction as he muttered something we could not catch. Then, drawing up after him a long stick, he sat himself down beside the tree stump and pulled out a handkerchief from his pocket. That is, at one time it had been a handkerchief, but now it was but a torn and dirty rag. Still it looked nearly white. We watched him silently. He sat there, not knowing that he was being watched, and took his time in fastening the handkerchief like a flag to one end of his stick. Then, shaking his fist again in the Pelham direction, he started for our stockade, holding high the stick, on which fluttered the bit of white.

"As I live," said Harold, with a chuckle, "I believe he is going to our camp. He expects us to take that dirty rag of his to be a flag of truce. What's he up to?"

"Come on," I said. I was not afraid of Ham Gardner at any time. And I surely was not afraid of him now when he carried a white flag and I carried a shotgun. So we shot out after him. He heard us coming and

dropped upon his knees and started for the bushes. But when he saw who we were he scrambled to his feet and hurried back to us.

"Hawkins," he cried, "I was just goin' to your place. I ain't comin' for fight, you see. Here's my white flag, which means I come peaceful."

"Yeah," I said. "What's your game, Ham?"

"I'm gonna git out of that," he said, with a nod toward the Pelham camp. "That new guy is a regular devil to me. I can't stand him no longer. Look."

He pulled up the back of his ragged blue shirt. Across his back were a dozen red stripes.

"Good Lord, Ham," I said. "You don't mean to say—"

"He done it," said Ham in a low voice. "He beat me with a strap because I let you boys throw all them logs of his into the river."

"Ah," said Harold. "I'm sorry, Ham; really I'm sorry you had to stand that punishment for something I did. It's too bad."

"Yeah," said Ham, "it's too late, too. Listen: If you don't want the same thing to happen to some o' your'n, you'd better act quick. Him and the others are on their way up the river now. Briggen spied your two boys goin' up this morning with the old doc. They're waitin' for those two boys to come back by themselves. Harkinson is goin' to make them two kids pay for what you done to his log pile."

"The scoundrel!" said Harold, and he was off like a shot toward our camp.

"Ham," I said, "it's good of you to tell us, believe me. I'll pay you back nicely when you want me to. You'd better get back to your post now quick. If you want me any time, come over to the tent with your

white flag up. I'll know it's you. I'll have to hurry along now."

Ham did not even smile as he hustled back to the tree stump, and Link and I flew after Harold. It did not take long to get the boys together and tell them that Johnny McLarren and Perry Stokes were being laid for by Harkinson and his gang of Pelhams. And it would have done you good to see how quickly they took to their canoes and the whole fleet started like a shot for the upper turn.

. . . . . .

We were too late!

Just as we turned the bend we caught sight of our two boys in the canoe coming down, both of them paddling rapidly with a loaded canoe between them. I urged my boys to paddle faster, and they tried, against the current, but, to our dismay, we saw, a quarter of a mile above us, the skiffs and flatboats of our Pelham foes leaving the bank and making swiftly for the lone canoe that was coming down stream. "Hurry!" I cried to those paddling near me, and you should have seen them strain their arms!

But the Pelham gang had neared their quarry. I saw Perry Stokes rise up and swing his paddle over his head. Then there came a shouting from the Pelhams as they closed around the helpless two in the loaded canoe. A skiff went over in the scuffle that followed. I saw two Pelhams hanging to the gunwales of the canoe; then it, too, went over, and the shouting and noise was enough to drive one deaf.

But then we arrived on the scene—late, but better than never. Jerry Moore started our battle cry as we drove into those Pelham boats. Each of our canoes picked a Pelham boat to grapple with, while I steered

straight over to where Perry Stokes was hanging onto a Pelham skiff, his lips pressed and his eyes closed, hanging like a bulldog, although a Pelham oar was battering his fingers to loosen his grip. I caught the skiff in the oarlock with my paddle. With one great effort I bore down. She answered like a sail to a wind. Just as Perry went down his end came over, the Pelham who sat in the stern toppled backward into the water, and the one who had been standing up lunged against my canoe as his boat capsized, and I yelled to Link to steady her—good old Link never misses—he didn't miss then. Our canoe sat upright, although she danced and careened around like a one-legged duck, and I reached out my paddle for Perry. He was spitting the foaming water from his lips as he came for the canoe. Link and I straddled the gunwales to balance her while Perry pulled himself into the canoe, and then we only, for the first time, had a look around to see how the fight was going elsewhere.

It was going good. Three Pelham flatboats already were hurrying away, glad to make their escape. Four of them floated down side up, while a number of Pelhams were scattering away through the bushes on either bank. But coming at us now was the worst of the lot—the one green skiff in which stood the leader of all this mischief—Harkinson. How his eyes glared at us! He seemed to be coming to me.

"How did you know?" he yelled harshly. "Who told you?"

I tried to answer him. But as I raised my head and looked into his face—oh, boy, those eyes—they held me dumb. I could not speak. His skiff, rowed by Briggen and Dave Burns, sped swiftly past us. He swung one arm and caught me full in the face with

his broad fist. I flopped down into the middle of the canoe as Perry and Link rose quickly to steady her, else we would have all been in the river.

"You coward!" I yelled. "Come back—come out on the bank there; fight like a square fighter, and I'll teach you something."

Only that harsh laugh that belonged to Harkinson came back to answer me.

VIII

Hawkins Against Harkinson

EVER since the fight on the river I had an idea that I should like to get close enough to Harkinson to pay him back that one nasty crack he gave me as his boat shot past mine. That was a cowardly trick, and I wanted to even it up.

But the ending of that water fight was peculiar, to say the least. We had won; yes, in the matter of result, we had won. But even though we had the Pelhams fleeing from us and half their number of boats floating upside down in the river, Harkinson went through without a scratch. He was not even touched. Those Pelhams who rowed his green skiff knew their work. How they threaded in and out of us! Harkinsoon stood up in his boat and directed the fight. Whenever one of our boys turned to tackle Harkinson he found it almost impossible to reach the unshapely bully. That's how it came about that I let him crack me—I could not have stopped him if I had seen his purpose at the outset. No, Harkinson's eyes held me while he sent his fist out to meet my face. It was his eyes—something like a snake's eyes, I guess—that held me.

"I'm beginning to believe," said Harold, as we gathered around our campfire that night, "that Harkinson can hypnotize a fellow. I never felt so strange in my life. When he looks straight at me I feel as though I could not move my arm or utter one word unless he commanded me to."

Strange as it may seem, Harold had spoken exactly

what I had been believing ever since I met Harkinson. Whatever it was, the power in Harkinson's eyes was enough to make a fellow—well, we will say frightened—so badly frightened that he is almost turned to stone. If you have never seen a fellow like Harkinson you won't understand. It was his looks and those strange green-gray eyes set in deep sockets in that dark-skinned head. That, as you saw him standing still. But when he moved toward you—oh, boy! I once saw a chipmunk try to get away from a snake—yes, it was just the same way: The snake held the poor thing spellbound until it struck its fang behind the little chipmunk's shoulder. Harkinson's long arms swung as he approached and they seemed long enough and powerful enough to crush the life out of a fellow.

Doc Waters had to stay in town for the next two days. And that night when we were sitting around the fire a storm came up and it began to rain. And how it did pour! We ran inside the tent and went to bed at once. There wasn't anything else to do. Lew Hunter tried to start some singing, but the noise of the storm drowned out his music, and after a little while he gave it up and put his accordion away. I was very glad to find that our tent turned aside the rain like a duck's back; but for a few dashes of wind-blown spray that came through the ventilators occasionally, we kept dry and warm. If you ever slept in a tent while the rain beats down upon it, you know how cozy it is. It is fine to sleep outdoors during a rain as long as you know you're not getting wet.

But next morning the sun was shining bright, and only the little pools of water in hollow places of the ground and here and there a fallen limb of a tree were left to remind us of the storm. The ground was muddy

on the river bank, and all of us boys went barefoot, and after breakfast had our regular swim in the pool. Then Roy Dobel, who did the cooking, told us we had better get busy and catch some fish, for we were all tired of the canned stuff we had been eating. So out came our fishing tackle, and the boys hunted different spots round about where each imagined the fish would bite best.

I stayed in the tent to write about last night and the storm, and in a while came Perry Stokes, smiling through the flap of the tent.

"Writin' again, sir?" he called.

"You can come in, but that 'sir' will have to stay out," I said, smiling back at him. "Perry, how many times have I told you to drop the 'sir' business? Now remember what I tell you."

"Very well, sir—Hawkins, I mean," he added hastily. I shook my head. "Hopeless," I said. He came in and stood beside me.

"That was a nasty, mean chock on the jaw that Harkinson gave you in the boat," he said. "It wasn't manly at all, sir."

"No," I agreed. "But what of it, Perry? What's there to do about it now?"

Perry's eyes sparkled as he smilingly answered: "He is to be paid back somehow. It wouldn't be well for our boys, sir, to let him get away with that. It would be like letting him call us cowards. We should show him his mistake, sir—Hawkins, no matter what the cost."

I looked at Perry with some pride, I must say, when I heard him talk like that.

"That's very good talk, Perry," I said, "but let matters run. Harkinson is running down a long, straight

lane, but there's no lane without a turning, you know. His day will come. When it does I will take care to uphold the honor of our boys, even if I have to stand a dozen more cracks like the one he gave me yesterday."

Perry seemed to be satisfied at this. But as he was walking out he turned and said: "I'm sorry, Hawkins, that it was you who had to stand the punch. I was right beside you. But the bully didn't seem to see me at all."

I laughed. "You just keep out of the way of his eyes, Perry," I said, "and you won't have any trouble. It's his eyes that do it. You'll have to get him from the rear if you hope to have success."

Perry bowed and left the tent. I finished my writing and afterward got out my box of fishing tackle. The boys were having good luck, and when they saw me come out they all yelled to me, each one claiming to have found the best place to fish. I sat myself between Will Standish and Harold Court, and threw in my line. For the racket they made you would not believe a fish would have stayed within ten feet of where the boys sat, but I must say it was a surprise to me to see the strings of fish they had caught. There were some nice silver perch in the stream, big fellows that showed signs of living well around the island shore. I guess the worms and water bugs kept them well supplied with food.

Now it was strange that no one had missed Perry Stokes. It showed me plainly that the other boys did not think much of Perry. He was only the caretaker and the janitor of the camp. That was the fact, I guess, that made the boys overlook him. But after I had caught a few fish and the novelty of it had worn off, I took a look around and counted my boys that were

fishing there on the bank. And, allowing for Roy Doble, who was making a fire in the stove by the tent, they were all there but Perry. My heart gave a leap as I remembered the kid's words about paying back the cowardly blow Harkinson had given me. I jumped up at once and put my line up. Harold asked me what was up.

"I'm going up to the Pelham camp," I said in a low tone, "and I'm going alone."

Harold begged to go along, but I gave him his orders to stay. Will Standish, too, asked me to let him go with me, but I shook my head. "Call Lew Hunter," I said. Will ran over to Lew and soon we four stood together.

"Lew," I said, "get the boys together in about fifteen minutes and get out your old accordion and tell them you intend to have singing practice. I want you boys to keep on singing till I get back here. Sing every song you know. Now, mind what I tell you. Start the singing in about fifteen minutes, Lew."

"I will, Hawkins," he said. "I think I understand what you want. Harmony."

"That's it," I said, "and you fellows will help me more by staying here and singing than you could possibly do if you were with me."

I felt angry with Perry Stokes as I rushed through the door of our stockade with my shotgun in my arm. The rain from the night before had made the ground muddy, and there was no path through this tangle of wildwood. I could have taken the clearing where I could have run, but then I would be in plain view, and I wanted to steal up to that Pelham stronghold without being seen. I guess I made it in about twelve minutes. I stood looking at the Pelham stockade,

over the top of which I could see the top of the log-house. Not a sound came from the place. Not a figure was to be seen. It made me bold to see the place so deserted, and I began to believe that Perry had not come here. Perhaps he had followed the Pelhams when they left. By this time they might have left the island on one of their hunting expeditions. Just as I was about to give up and go back to our camp I heard the yell of a boy. It came from inside the stockade. That was the only sound. A yell as if some kid was getting a beating. And then it came again—and I leaped clear over the bushes and ran to the fence of logs. The gate was fastened with a chain and passed through to the inside, where it was held, so that nobody could open it but from within. The yell came again. This time like a scream, and I began to pound on the gate with the butt end of my gun.

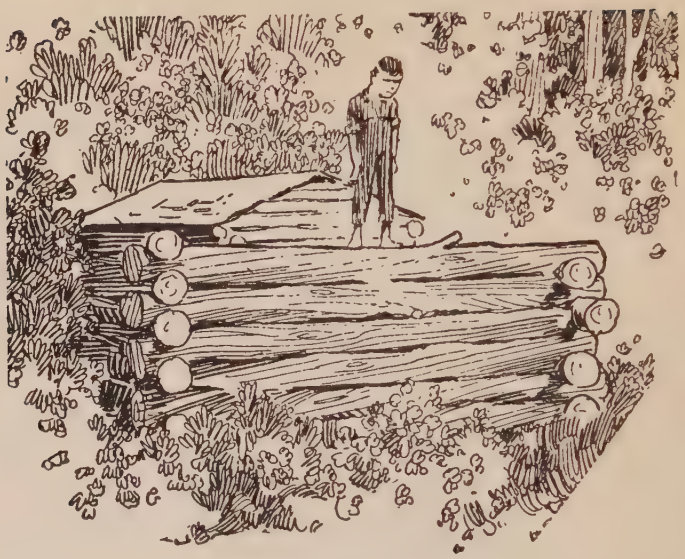
"Open this gate," I yelled, "or I'll knock it down!"

I was surprised to find the gate open so quickly. Harkinson stood there, holding a strap in his hand, smiling ugly.

"Come in," he said.

I did not answer. Neither did I look into his face. I decided to keep away from the hypnotizing look of those eyes. Instead I looked at a sight that made me mad through and through. It was poor Ham Gardner tied to a post, his back bare and covered with stripes. I rushed inside and over to the post where Ham Gardner was tied. The first thing I saw was Ham's hunting knife still in his belt. I grabbed it and slashed the rope that held his wrists to the stake. Then I turned fiercely upon Harkinson, who was standing with his arms folded, watching me with an evil grin.

"You coward," I said. "I'm going to tell you right



now that you've got to stop treating these boys in this manner. The sheriff will tell you where to get off. I don't care if it's a Pelham or anybody else. What right have you to thrash him like this?"

"I won't ask you or the sheriff what I ought to do," said Harkinson, coming close to me. "You know you can't do anything without law. And if you break a law you get punished. This fellow knew what would be coming to him, and he went and broke one of our laws anyhow."

"What did he do?" I asked.

"He's hid one of your own guys," replied Harkinson in a savage tone. "One of your spies that came over here, and would have got what he deserved if this double-crosser hadn't put him somewhere. So he has to take the medicine your fellow was to get."

"Listen," I said to Harkinson, keeping my eyes lowered to his shoulders: "You're not going to beat any of my boys like this, and you're not going to beat any Pelhams, either."

"I TURNED TO LOOK, AND SAW HIM STILL STANDING ON THE STOCKADE."

"Oh! Is that so?" exclaimed Harkinson. Before I could get my gun up his long, wiry arms were around me. I dropped the gun and grappled with him. I began to feel as though he were choking the breath out of my body. He was just a head taller than I was, and my head was being pressed close to his chest. I struggled in that grip of iron, and then a happy thought came to me. I raised my head up sharply and with all the force I could. I heard the click of his teeth as my skull crashed up against his chin and he had to loose his grip of me to catch his balance as he shot backward. But before I could make the few steps that separated me from the gun, he was upon me again like a tiger. I squared off and drew back my right and let him have it with all the strength I could straight from the shoulder. It caught him square on the jaw and he bellowed loudly as he reeled back, his long arms working like windmills. However, it made him only more angry, and I knew then that that was all I had and Harkinson would get the best of me now. I tried to hold him off at elbow length, but he crushed with those powerful arms like a bear. Down he bore me, while his one fist sent painful blows to my head. My back felt as though it was about to crack, but still I struggled with the heavy odds against me.

Then, as though some voice had called to him to stop, Harkinson suddenly let go of me and turned away. I fell in a heap upon the ground, exhausted and bruised. Ham Gardner ran to me and helped me to my feet. "Beat it," he whispered. "You can't match him."

And I hurried to follow Ham's advice. I reached my gun and started for the gate. As I did so I saw Harkinson standing on the top of the stockade listening with his hand to his ear. I stood still and listened.

Ah! Strains of "Home, Sweet Home" faintly drifting on the breeze from our camp. That's what it was that stopped the ugly bully, and there was a smile upon his unshapely features as he stood listening to the singing. He seemed to have forgotten I was near. I slipped through the gate unnoticed. He did not even glance down, and after I had gone a distance in the tanglewood I turned to look and saw him still standing on the stockade like a statue, listening to the harmony that came riding on the breeze from our camp.

Perry was in camp when I returned. "How," I asked, "did you get out? Ham Gardner said he helped you hide. How comes it that you beat me home?"

"Ham showed me the trap door in the log house, sir," answered Perry, "and I was quick to enter it and run through the tunnel. It takes you to the old hollow tree stump, sir, where I made my escape and hurried back here."

IX

Hawkins Dons the Gloves

"IT WOULDN'T be a bad idea, Hawkins," said Will Standish, "to try your hand at boxing. You don't know how easy it is to handle a big fellow like Harkinson if you know how to use your punches and keep away from his reach. Why not take a few lessons? You'll be able to take care of yourself it you should ever meet him alone some time. And you never can tell."

This suited me to a tee, and I told Will so. I had been watching him and Harold boxing that morning, and I was surprised at both of them. I wished that I could box half as good as they did. And now, when I had the chance to learn some of their tricks with the gloves, I took them up.

They both were smiling as Will put on his gloves and Harold helped me on with mine. "You'll like it, Hawkins," said Harold; "it's great sport. Just wait and see."

I saw soon enough. Will danced around me so fast that I never could get at him, while at the same time he touched me on the cheek or on the chest whenever he pleased, and soon had me panting for breath. Then his "touches" grew stronger and began to sting. They got me sore at length, because I could not give him any in return. Whenever I sent my fist to his face his face would not be there, but at the same time I would get a neat tap on my chin or nose that was enough to make any fellow sore.

"For the love of Mike, stand still a minute," I yelled. "How do you expect me to hit you when you dodge around like that?"

Will and Harold both laughed. "Do the same," said Will, "and you won't be easy for me to reach."

Well, I tried ducking and dancing, but Will's slim body ran rings around me, and if he wanted to he could have knocked me over in a corner as often as he pleased.

I finally threw off the gloves and said I was through. But once you get started you like the sport. In the afternoon we put on the gloves again, but it was just the same. I stood another good punching, and Will and Harold laughed, but said I was getting on. Harold wanted me to try him for a few rounds, but I told them that I had better get back to the tent, where I had to do some writing, and that later in the day I would tackle him, and that I had learned a few points and was sure I could knock him from here to the river in the first round.

But Harold was the same as Will. Those kids knew how. I never could get any nearer Harold than I could to Will, and once when I thought I saw an easy chance to sail my right glove into his nose, he pretended to come at me with his left and dodged his head over to the right and came up under my left arm with such a sound right wallop that I went spinning across the grass and landed on my back."

"Listen," I said: "This is only in fun; you don't have to sock me so hard, you rummy."

I wouldn't put on the gloves any more that day, but Will and Harold did fool a couple of the other boys into going a few rounds with them. It all ended the same way as my own practice. But I began to study their tricks now. I took in everything, and it made me

decide that I must be more careful in future practice. I saw how simple some of those tricks were when you know how. I made up my mind that I could see what kind of blows they intended to strike, and that if I could meet them and turn them aside I would not get such a bad mauling, even if I did not give much punishment.

Harold and I put on the gloves the next morning. He sailed into me with the same confidence, but he found that I had got wise to some of his stunts. I blocked his blows as they came. Then when he did hit me on the head so that I saw stars I laughed at it instead of getting angry. I wasn't going to lose my temper and my head. So when I stood him off that way about two rounds, Harold decided that he would finish me. I let him come, and I got in my first blow that made him sit down quite suddenly and look up at me in surprise. Then he turned to Will and said, "Hawkins is getting on, don't you think?"

It seemed as though every boy in the camp was anxious to learn, and from that time on there was always some boxing practice going on. Doc Waters enjoyed this very much. He said it was fine exercise for us, and it would do us good to learn how to give and take. There were times when some of the fellows would get sore when they got a jab or a hook, or whatever they call those stinging blows that come like a surprise party, but we soon made it understood that anybody that lost his temper during a boxing practice would not be allowed to put on the gloves again. So that in a short time it was real sport and enjoyed by the whole bunch.

If you like to see something funny you should see the Skinny Guy boxing. Oh boy, I never laughed so much in my life as I did the first time Link put on the

gloves. He had been watching us for a long time, and he seemed to think the only thing he had to do was to keep dancing and running around so that nobody could reach him. He made a game of tag out of it. His raw-boned, skinny figure, his long legs, and always that wide grin on his thin face made him look the funniest fighter I ever saw. But the Skinny Guy soon learned how to send in his blows, and though the long arm was not strong in looks it carried quite a strong punch, as I often found out when I tried my hand at him.

. . . . . .

We were surprised just after breakfast to hear someone calling outside of our stockade fence. We hurried out of the tent and I saw a white flag waving just over the top of the barricade.

"Hawkins!" came the call, "Hawkins!"

I recognized Ham Gardner's voice. "Open the gate and let him in," I told Bill Darby. The gate was opened quickly and in came Ham Gardner with his white flag of truce. But he was not alone. With him came Briggen, the Pelham leader, and Dave Burns.

"We come peaceful," hollered Briggen, seeing some of our boys approach him quickly. "Hold off your fellas, Hawkins, we come peaceful."

"Your white flag tells me that," I said; "you are safe. What is the reason of your honorable visit to our despised camp?"

Briggen frowned, and some of our boys laughed.

"You talk, Ham," said Briggen; "you tell him."

Now, a more comical sight I never want to see than those three Pelham leaders standing there in a group, Ham holding up his white flag as though he were afraid that if they let go of that sign of truce they would not

be safe within our camp. I could not help smiling as Ham began.

"We are sick and tired of it, Hawkins," he said, "and we want Harkinson to git out."

"You mean you want us to help you chase him out of your gang. Isn't that it?"

"Yes," said Briggen, quickly, "that's it, Hawkins. You guys got as much reason as we have to git rid o' Harkinson. He hates you worse 'n us. He is bound to git some of you if you don't git him away from here."

"We think we can take care of ourselves," I said, "and we are not afraid of Harkinson, nor of you, Briggen, or any of your fellows. What's the trouble between you boys and Harkinson?"

"He gits too fresh with my boys," said Briggen. "He thinks he can whip 'em all whenever he pleases. He ain't touched me yet, but look at Ham there. Just look at his back, will you? It's a sight from the lashings. And Dave here. Dave's got a couple of beatings, too, just because he didn't jump quick enough when Harkinson ordered him to. And he is gittin' worse and worse. Us boys want to be let alone. We can run our own business without a fella like Harkinson tellin' us how."

"Well," I said, "you boys ought to be able to do your own bouncing. Bounce Harkinson out. How many fellows have you, Briggen?"

"Fourteen."

"That's about one more than you need to whip Harkinson, don't you think?"

"Plenty, if it weren't for something else. He's queer. He ain't like other kids. We could lick him if he was. But he's odd."

"What do you mean? Just what do you call odd?"

Briggen stopped at my question and gazed around at the faces of my boys standing behind us. Then he said:

"I guess you guys don't believe in such stuff, but Harkinson's got a gift. He hypnotizes you when you look at him."

"That's right," said Ham Gardner, in a nervous whisper; "he hypnotizes me. I got to do what he tells me. I ain't able to say no to him, Hawkins. Listen: You been good to me, Hawkins. I ain't never had nothin' agin you. You will help us chase this Harkinson out, won't you?"

Now, even though Ham Gardner is a Pelham fellow, I always had a kind of a pity for him anyway, because he is a simple sort of a boy, and the only reason he has got into so much trouble at times is because he is in with the Pelham crowd and is a chum of Briggen's. So I told him we would help, but they would have to do their own part. This idea of Harkinson's hypnotizing eyes was no joke as far as I knew, because I always felt the same way about him whenever I was under his strange eyes.

So the Pelham committee went back with their white flag and some instructions that I had given. That night was the time we decided on. They were to give us the sign. The signal was to be a rocket taken from the left-over odds and ends of our Fourth of July celebration. I had found four of them in the wooden camp chest, and these I gave to Ham, telling him the first might not go off, and he better take several.

We ate an early supper and then talked over our plans, after which we sang songs in front of the tent till it got dark. All of us boys knew what was to be done, and each knew what part he was to play. Dark-

ness came while we sang, and though we continued singing to throw off any suspicion Harkinson might have had, we watched the sky over the other end of the island for the signal. But it was slow coming. We had to stop our singing, because we had sung all we knew, and we were beginning to think that Ham Gardner's plans had been discovered, and that Harkinson had got wise. But then came the long snaky flash of sparks in the sky as the rocket went up. In a minute we were all headed for the stockade.

Ham Gardner and Dave Burns were there to meet us, the gate open, and everything as quiet as could be. "He's asleep," whispered Ham. We quietly hurried into the log house. Harkinson lay upon a blanket. Quickly we pulled forth the long rope we had brought. But Harkinson was queer. How could we fool him? Even in his sleep he seemed to be able to read our minds. With a roar he jumped from his pallet and leaped upon Bill Darby, who was just passing the rope to Harold and me.

"What's this?" he yelled. "What do you think you're doing?"

Nobody attempted to answer him. Nobody could. The dim light from the oil lamp on the side wall threw a hard glitter into Harkinson's eyes as he gazed at us. His hard look came full upon me and his mouth twisted into a sneer as he said:

"Ah, it's you again, is it? Well, now I'll teach you a lesson that will last you, I think."

I admit I was trembling, nervous, and I tried to think quickly, but again I was held by those eyes of his. It was his swift movement toward me that allowed me to snatch my gaze away from his face, and I centered my eyes upon his chin, and then I stepped

back and pulled one of the tricks that Will's boxing lessons had taught me. When he struck, his fist passed my head just by a fraction, while I, still holding my gaze upon his chin, pretended to go for him with my left, but as he snarled and pulled over to avoid it I sent my right cracking to that chin—oh, boy, how my knuckles hurt! To see him fall was my great surprise. I never believed I could have put enough strength into a blow that would drop a big husky like that. But Will Standish was upon him in a flash, and Ham Gardner and Briggen and Dave—in fact, all the Pelhams were on top of their former leader. But it was Will, anyhow, who turned the trick. He had the sense to use his handkerchief for a bandage with which he blindfolded Harkinson. I only noticed that after I had bound his feet with the rope and started to bind his wrists. "Good boy," I said to Will. "Stand back, fellows; no need to be afraid of his eyes now."

There we had him at last, standing before us, bound hand and foot, unable to move, and his eyes blindfolded. He strained some at his ropes first, but gave it up, although he rained down upon us all the harsh names and abuse he could think of. The boys fell back now, while I sat myself down on one of the Pelham's camp stools, and Will and Jerry Moore stood ready on either side of our captive.

"Harkinson," I said, "this is the end of your bullyragging. There is only one thing to do with you, and that is to turn you over to the sheriff for beating up these poor kids. What do you say?"

He did not reply. "Well," I continued, "you've got one chance to escape the sheriff: If you promise to stay away—promise, I mean—and never bother the

Pelhams or us again we will let you go back to your own place and your own pals."

The Pelham fellows objected. "Don't trust him," said Briggen; "he ain't no good to his word, Hawkins. Let the sheriff take him before Judge Granbery. He ain't had no right to whip my boys like he did."

But I did not want that. I knew that every time Judge Granbery heard of us having trouble with a stranger we always got the blame for it, anyway. So I said again:

"Harkinson knows we will not allow him down here again. He knows that we are able to catch him somehow, and if we catch him once more—"

"I'll go," said Harkinson in a thick, coarse voice. "I ain't no fool. I make a bargain and keep it. You got the drop on me."

So after we got Briggen to agree that it was best not to make any fuss over it, we let Harkinson go. That is, we saw to it that he went back. I asked Briggen if he knew the meeting place of Harkinson's pals, and he said he did. It was up in Watertown, in the shack in the alley where we had first seen Three-Finger Fred. So I said that Briggen and some of his fellows would have to take him up in Harkinson's green skiff and leave him bound where some of his pals would find him. For I would not risk setting Harkinson free to go back by himself. You see, we would have had to remove the blindfold from his eyes, so that he could go, and if he could have had the chance to turn those eyes toward us again he might have held us all spellbound while he compelled us to do as he wished. I wasn't taking any chances with Harkinson.

X

The End of Vacation

MAYBE we should not have given Briggen and his Pelhams the job of taking Harkinson back to Watertown. I think that is where we made our big mistake. But, no matter now; it's done, and there is no use of crying over spilled milk. But anyway, I am sure that Harkinson started to talk to those Pelham fellows while they were rowing him back. I think he talked all around them, and I believe that before they reached the wharf at Watertown he had induced them to be partners with him again. I say I think this is so. I don't know for certain, because I was not with them, and Briggen did not come back to tell me how everything went.

The next morning we saw a steamboat coming up the river. Doc Waters, who had come down to our camp before we had breakfast, asked me if I could tell what boat she was. "The *Hudson Lee*," I said. "Hail her, then," said Doc. "I want to talk to Captain Lee."

We hailed the boat while she was a quarter of a mile off. She sighted us, and the mate, standing on the rail, yelled "All right!" through a megaphone. We saw the boat turn slowly out of the channel and push her nose into the still water near the shore. At the same time a gangplank was lowered. Doc ran forward to meet the captain, who is a fine man and a friend of his. While they were talking all of us boys gathered around the gangplank, down which there came two boys about our age and a girl.

The first boy I recognized. It was Hudson Lee, son of the captain of the boat. The other boy was a smart-looking chap, but I had never before seen him. The girl, too, I knew. It was Rosalind Lee, sister of Hudson. She spied out the Skinny Guy and ran forward.

"Oh, aren't you Link Lambert?" she cried taking his hands and smiling up into his face. "Yes, I know you are. You're the boy who fished my rag doll out of the river when I was a very little girl."

Link blushed, but smiled as he replied:

"Yeah, I remember. But you're not such a big girl now. Seems like you haven't grown much."

"I like that," said Rosalind, pouting. "I am ever so much bigger. But I could never forget you. I always told daddy I wanted to come and see you again."

The other boys had a notion that Rosalind did not see them at all; indeed, she acted as if there was no one there but Link. And so, grinning and whispering, they all moved back to where I stood with Hudson Lee and his companion.

"You're Seckatary Hawkins," said Hudson Lee, shaking my hand. "It's been some time since we met, but I suppose you can remember me."

"I do," I said, smiling. "I've always had a wish to see you again, but your daddy's boat does not often stop at our old wharf any more."

"No," laughed Hudson, "but then I don't ride in it often, either. He's sent me away to school the last two years. I seldom get this far up the river. Come up here, Shadow. I want you to meet Seckatary Hawkins."

This last he said to his handsome companion. He stepped up and shook my hand.

"Shadow Loomis," said Hudson Lee with a smile,

"the real, genuine Shadow Loomis you've heard so much about."

"Glad to know you, Seckatary Hawkins," he said, gripping my hand. I returned the compliment, but I felt like telling Hudson Lee I hadn't heard much about Shadow Loomis; in fact, I had never heard of him before now.

"Shadow is the most wonderful magician you ever saw," said Hudson Lee. "You should see him do some of his tricks. Pull one for Hawkins now, Shadow."

Shadow stooped suddenly and patted my pockets as though he were feeling for something. It amused me.

"You've got it somewhere," he said to me. "See if it's in that pocket."

"Where?" I put my hand to the pocket he was pointing at, and of a sudden I got quite a shock. I felt something moving—something soft and warm, and I grasped it and pulled it out of my pocket. It was a white rat. "For the love of Mike," I said. All the other boys laughed.

"Come on," said Shadow Loomis, "his brother is there, too. Get him out for me; that's a good fellow."

I couldn't believe him, even though I had pulled one out of my pocket, but anyway, to be sociable, I put my hand again in my pocket. Then I cried: "You're wrong this time. Pocket empty. See?" I turned it inside out. Shadow Loomis shook his head. "He's in there somewhere," he said. "My pets always travel two by two—never go out alone. Wait; let's see. Sometimes they take the wrong way and get lost; might be back here—"

All this time he was talking and shoving his hands into my pockets, but I grinned, for I felt that he was going to be mistaken this one time, when all of a sudden

I felt a scratching down my back, and as I did so Shadow Loomis shoved his hand down behind my collar and brought up another white rat. "I told you so," he said, smiling, "always two by two, never go out alone."

"Well, I be dern," said Jerry Moore. "Say, boy, where'd you learn those tricks?"

Shadow Loomis and Hudson Lee laughed and we all joined in.

"Come natural," said Shadow. "Never takes me long to find out anything. Now, just like that stuff you've got in your pocket there. It's there, and yet you would say it isn't. I don't mind agreeing with you that it would be silly for a fellow to carry around a pocketful of stuff like that, but there's no explaining why people do some things. Throw it out and be done with it."

Jerry shoved his hand into his pocket and drew it out quickly. It was covered with flour. For a moment he gazed at the white fingers, and then he blurted out:

"That's Roy Dobel's tomfooling. He better quit wasting the camp's flour. Hey, you, Roy!"

Roy, who was working around the cookstove up by the kitchen tent, turned when he heard his name and called out, "What you want?"

Shadow Loomis laid his hand on Jerry's arm and said: "Excuse me if I hurt your feelings. It was only a little fun. Roy didn't do it, you can take my word. I'll teach you the trick some day, and then you can play it on Roy."

Jerry seemed to be satisfied and turned his pocket inside out and a lot of flour poured out upon the ground. Shadow Loomis put his pet rats into his own pockets. I noticed that he had big pockets, and some of them in the lining of his coat, where he carried his tricks, I sup-

pose. The boys were all very much interested and amused at Shadow Loomis's tricks, and we took them all through our camp, which interested them very much. They seemed to think our experiences with Harkinson, which I related to them, were the best kind of adventure, and Hudson Lee said he would give anything if he could have been with us on some of those times. Shadow Loomis said he should like to meet this Harkinson. I told him he would be better off if he let Harkinson alone. At which Shadow Loomis just smiled, and I thought to myself maybe Shadow could put over a few of his magic tricks on Harkinson that would scare the big bully enough to last him a long time.

Link had been sitting by Rosalind Lee during all this talk, never noticing us at all. Rosalind was a very cheerful little girl, and I don't blame Link for feeling proud because she gave him such fine compliments. But their little chat was brought to an end when Doc Waters and Captain Lee came forward. "All aboard, boys," called Captain Lee. We all walked down to the gangplank with them. Doc and the Captain were talking about a launch or a motorboat of some kind.

"It's in running order, all right," Doc was saying, "but I don't want a single soul to touch her wheel till the boy gets her. It's a sort of a fancy his mother had, and I want to do everything the way she wants."

"All right, Doctor," laughed the Captain, "I'll tow her down just as they hand her over to me, and not a foot shall step aboard her till the boy gets her. Come along, youngsters. Good-by, Doctor."

We watched them until the steamboat turned the upper bend. The two boys and Rosalind hung to her stern rail, waving at us until they were out of sight. Then we turned again to the tent.

"IT'S A SURPRISE, LINK," SAID DOC WATERS,—"YOUR MOTHER HAD IT MADE FOR YOU."

"What's the launch business about, Doc?" I asked.

"Oh, you'll see in time," said Doc, with a grin.

Link stood there on the shore with his arms folded watching the bend where the steamer had disappeared.

"She's gone, Link," I said.

"She sure is a beauty," he said.

"Oh, Rosalind, yes. I was speaking of the steamer," I said.

"So was I," retorted Link, but he blushed just the same.

I just couldn't help teasing him a little about the girl. But when the other boys tried it I put a stop to it at once. I might joke with my Skinny Guy a little, but nobody else was going to do it while I was around.

"We will break camp to-morrow, Hawkins," said Doc to me. "Have the boys get things ready."

I broke the news to the boys, and they seemed well satisfied to go back home. We had had a good vacation on the island, and about all the camp life we wanted, to say nothing of the excitement Harkinson had given us. By nighttime we had all things packed except cots and bedding. And early next morning we set to work packing that.

It was about noon when the *Hudson Lee* turned the bend up the river on return trip. I noticed that she was towing something, and when she came nearer I saw that it was a large motorboat, the hull painted green and white, but her upper was covered entirely with a tarpaulin, showing only a fancy bit of her cabin roof. The steamboat landed in the same old spot and we all ran down to meet her.

Captain Lee came ashore, followed by the two boys and Rosalind, and greeted Doc and us boys heartily. Some of the helpers from the steamboat uncovered the

motor boat, and what a beauty she was! Why, it was a regular little river yacht, and I bet she cost close to a thousand. Upon her white bows I read the name *Cazanova.*

"It's a surprise, Link," said Doc Waters to the Skinny Guy, who stood looking at it with a smile upon his thin face. "Your mother had it made for you. She didn't want me to tell. So I didn't. And she didn't want a soul to go aboard until you took hold of the wheel. So there she is, boy, and I hope you like her."

"Like her!" Link cried. Then he sprang into the boat with a light step and ran forward to the little wheelhouse. He grasped the spokes and turned to us. "It's all right now," he called. "I've got hold of the wheel, and you can all come in."

It was a beauty. We never got through praising her. And if Roy hadn't called "lunch" we probably would have stayed in her all day. But our visitors stayed to lunch with us and during the afternoon Hudson Lee and Shadow Loomis joined us in a game of ball, while Rosalind looked on. I think Link batted the ball better that afternoon than he ever did in his life.

Meanwhile Captain Lee had his men pack our belongings into the big launch, which could have carried twice as much. Then his mechanics tested her out and found that the *Cazanova* was in perfect running order. Will Standish offered to run her back home for us, and to teach Link how to run the launch. Will has a beauty of his own, and he is an expert at running one, as Link and I both knew.

I hopped off long enough to tell Hudson Lee and Shadow Loomis that I wanted them to come up to our clubhouse some time. They promised to come when they had a chance. They helped us stow the canoes on

the top deck of the big launch, and we shook hands all around, and then it was "All aboard!"

And thus we left our camping ground and went back to our own shore. The boys all crowded forward to the wheelhouse, watching Will Standish, but I went back in the stern and sat with Doc, who was peacefully smoking a fat cigar, watching the steamboat pull away from the island and start on her trip down.

XI

Link's Farewell Party

WE WERE all glad to get back to our home shore again. We had had enough of camping, and it was good to be back in our club house in the hollow. We held a meeting there the morning after we came home. Every boy answered to his name when Dick called the roll. Soon and it would be different; only a few more meetings, and there would be four fellows who would not be there to answer when their names were called. For Oliver and Harold, the twins, were going back to their fancy school in Massachusetts, and Link and Will Standish were going to the new home that Link's mother and daddy had bought down in the blue grass. Will Standish was to live with Link's folks until his father would come to take him back to Cuba.

Link made a speech at that meeting. Yes, sir! I never knew the Skinny Guy to have the nerve to do it. But since he has come back out of Cuba Link is changed a good deal. He keeps his hair cut, for one thing. You would hardly know him; he is a pretty good-looking kid when he's dressed up. He used to look something like a clown when we first met him, with his hair curling up behind his ears and that everlasting grin on his thin face. But that was a different Link from the one we know now.

"Boys," he said, "I don't make good speeches, but I felt like I ought to tell you boys how much I thank you for all the things you did for me since I came to this river. I'm sorry I've got to go, and I wish you all

could come along, but that can't be, I reckon. But you boys will come down to my house and see me some time and we will have lots of fun. Doc Waters is going to give a farewell party, he told me yesterday. All of you boys have got to be present. It's going to be in my new launch. We will have a good time, I guess; you know Doc Waters. Ice cream and cakes and candy and everything."

The boys cheered Link, and he blushed as he took his seat. If there is anything the boys like it's parties Doc Waters fixes up. The last one we had was the day before Link and I started for Cuba.

After the boys had gone out to the swimming hole, Link came to me as I was writing in my little office back of the clubroom.

"Hawkins," he says, "I'd like to invite some friends of mine to the party. Do you think the boys would feel like it was butting in?"

"Lord, no!" I exclaimed. "It's your party, Link. You don't have to ask anybody whom you shall invite."

"Well, then, I want to ask Hudson Lee and Shadow Loomis."

"And Rosalind."

"Yes, of course, Rosalind. Hudson and Shadow are fine boys, don't you think so, Hawkins?"

"They don't come any better. And Rosalind is—"

"Then I'll invite the three of 'em," interrupted Link. "I'll have Doc send a message."

I smiled as I watched Link walk down the path toward the river. I knew that Link liked little Rosalind Lee because she thought so much of him for fishing her rag doll out of the river some years ago. It was only that he wanted to see her once more before he went away that he thought about inviting her brother and Shadow

Loomis. I imagine Link would not have grieved very much if Hudson was unable to attend as long as his pretty little sister would be there. I told the other boys that if they cared to bring any of their sisters to the party it would be all right, as we were going to have a regular party, and we might as well do it first class. And I knew Rosalind would like it better if there were other girls there. I explained it to Doc Waters, and he said it was a good idea.

. . . . . .

I wonder why it was I felt so sure that we had nothing more to fear from Harkinson? Since I had sent him back to Watertown with the Pelham leaders I felt safe. It was only when Harold came into my little writing-room one morning that I began to wonder if the bully with the queer eyes was really gone from our shore.

"You seem to think he will obey you like a lamb," said Harold to me, "and I think he is only watching for a chance to get even with us. You, in particular, Hawkins. He never can forget that last punch you gave him, and even if it wasn't for that, he surely felt awfully cheap when you turned the tables on him and made him do as you wished."

"You think he is back here, then?" I asked.

"I don't say that," answered Harold, "but it is wise to keep a lookout for him. He may show up when you least expect him. And, believe me, when he does he will not come single-handed. He has followers, you can bet. Now, this party: What's to attract him more than the bright lights of a launch in which there is a gay time going on?"

I thought of it more the morning of the day on which we were to have the party. The boys had come from

Doc Waters's office with a basketful of Japanese lanterns, which they strung around the clubhouse porch and a line of them down to the water's edge. Yes, there would be plenty to attract—if not Harkinson, then Pelham. We never yet had any kind of doings of the kind without a little skirmish with the Pelham fellows.

"You and I will keep a watch," I said to Harold. "Best that we say nothing to the others. It would would only make them all nervous, and how could they enjoy a party if they expected the coming of such a fellow as Harkinson?"

"It's the best way," said Harold.

That afternoon we had a game of ball, and it was hardly finished when there came the sound of the steamboat whistle of the *Hudson Lee*—every boy can tell you what steamboat is passing by the sound of her whistle. Every whistle sounds different, and you get to know each boat by the whistle. Well, we knew this was the *Hudson Lee.*

We all ran down to meet the big boat, for it was bringing back the three friends Link had invited to his party. Link's new motor boat lay tied up at our little wharf, and the steamer had to slow up and wait until we moved the new boat out of her way. Only one boat can land at our little wharf at one time. Will Standish saw that the big steamer waited, and he sprang into the launch and took her up the river a piece, where he held her steady until the *Hudson Lee* had made the landing. Then he brought the *Cazanova* alongside the steamboat and made her fast.

The first one off the steamer's gangplank was Shadow Loomis. He looked happy as he came running to us. "Hello!" he yelled; "I'm back again with a bundle of

new tricks. No rats, though." Then he turned to Jerry Moore and said: "No more flour in pockets, either."

"Where's Hudson?" I asked. "Hope he didn't disappoint us."

"Oh, no," replied Shadow, "he is on deck. He's not allowed to leave the boat till Rosalind is ready. She's been taking a nap since we started, and she just woke up. She's putting on her new dress, I think. There's Huddy now. Poor kid, his pop always makes him wait till Rosalind is ready to come on shore."

Hudson had come to the rail of the cabin deck and saluted us boys. We all saluted back.

"Shore ahoy!" he yelled. "What's in the wind, Hawkins?"

"Come and see," I shouted back.

At that moment Rosalind came out of her cabin, and within a few minutes both of them came down the gangplank to join us.

"Hello, Hawkins," sang out Hudson, as he came up and held out his hand. He was the greatest boy for shaking hands I ever knew. But I liked him. "I didn't expect to be back so soon, old Seckatary."

"Glad you came," I said.

"Sure," said he, "and so is Shadow. Ever since he met you, Hawkins, he has been wanting to come back. I've been telling him about your Pelham enemies across the river."

"Lead me to 'em," said Shadow, with a grin. "If I don't scare every one of 'em into fits I'm a monkey."

"I wish you could," I said, laughing at the funny way he spoke. "Believe me, Shadow, there are times when we could use you. We can't do any of those magic tricks that you know. So all we can do is to turn the

trick with our fists, if we are able. And sometimes we get the worst of that, too."

Shadow walked down a little way so that he could look beyond the steamboat and get a view of Pelham.

"Dirty looking place," he said. "Like a rat's nest. Look there: a boat is pulling away from the river. Who's that cross-looking kid with the green cap?"

"That's Briggen," I answered. "He's the leader of Pelham."

"Huh," grunted Shadow. "I bet he's a tough customer. Look! I believe they're pulling for this side. Yes, they're coming here, all right. Now I'll get a chance to hear how these birds talk. Step up here, Hawkins. They won't want to talk to me."

While we waited for the Pelham boat I glanced around and saw Captain Lee and another officer of the steamboat walking up the river path toward Doc Waters's house, and following them went the Skinny Guy and little Rosalind, talking and laughing as they went. Rosalind seemed to be very proud of her new party dress, and from the way Link nodded his head I imagined he was telling her it was a very beautiful dress indeed.

When I turned my eyes back to the river the Pelham flatboat was pulling sharply around the paddle-wheel of the big steamer. Briggen sat, arms folded, in the stern, while Ham Gardner and Dave Burns handled the oars. I walked down to meet them and Shadow Loomis walked beside me. Jerry kept the other boys up on the bank. Briggen leaped out of the boat and came up.

"Who's the new guy?" he asked, nodding his head toward Shadow Loomis. "Tell him to clear out. I got to talk to you private, Hawkins."

I followed Briggen over to the bushes on the side of the path.

"Well?" I said.

"I come to ask you," began Briggen in a low voice, "what you guys are up to now. Our watchman saw you, all right. I can't figger out your game, Hawkins. If you think us boys double-crossed you—"

"Nonsense," I broke in. "You're talking foolish. As long as you fellows stay on your side of the river we have nothing against you."

"We will stay on our side as long as you guys stay on yours," said Briggen.

"I think we have been staying pretty close to our shore," I said, "and I know none of us have been over there since we came back from camp."

"Well, then, who has? Lanigan saw 'em, and he don't lie to me. There was a bunch of 'em last night spying around. If it wasn't your fellas, who was it?"

"Harkinson," I answered; "him and his pals."

Briggen's face faded a little and his jaw dropped. "You mean it?" he asked. "You mean that hypnotizer come back—?"

"Briggen," I said, "I am going to warn you boys to keep your eyes open. I haven't seen him, no. That's the worst part of it. I wish I had. You know what he is. If you find out anything us boys will help you out if you need help. But you better lay low and keep out of the way. Now go back. I don't want to talk to you. I've got company to-day."

. . . . . .

That night we had the party. It was a fine affair. Doc Waters brought down old Judge Granbery and the Sheriff, Link's daddy and mother, and old Abner Green,

the colored servant, who was to prepare the feast. We had the clubhouse lighted with lanterns, and from the porch down to the steamboat there streamed a long line of colored lights that made the place look bright and cheery. Lew Hunter brought the preacher, and when those grown-up folks met in our clubhouse they seemed to enjoy it as much as we did. Bill Darby brought his sister Lillian and Jerry Moore's sisters Ella and Grace came with him. They all seemed to like Rosalind very much. This was the first party we had to which girls had been invited since the Valentine Day when Link fished Rosalind's doll out of the river and sent it to her as a valentine. You remember that? Well, it seemed odd to have girls in our clubhouse; but they thought it was just grand.

We had to sing, of course: Judge Granbery demanded that. So Lew had to get up to the organ, and we stood around and let the Judge have every song we knew. The old Judge sat with his eyes half closed and a smile on his face while we sang. Doc looked proud of us boys. Link's mother listened with a happy face, and often I saw her hand steal to her cheek and brush her eyelashes.

Then the girls had their little speeches to make, too. All of them could recite. Such nice, sad pieces. Everybody clapped their hands. I was glad when I saw the dusky face of Abner in the doorway, whispering for Doc. Old Abner was all decked out in a white suit like a waiter. "It's all ready, suh," he whispered to Doc. "De table am set 'n ev'athing."

Then we all followed Doc down to Link's new launch that lay on the river like a fairy house, its bright lights shining through the little windows onto the water like streams of gold. It was a happy party that followed the

lines of hanging lanterns down to that new boat of Link's. And when we entered we saw before us the whole length of the main cabin a long table, set for two dozen persons, ice cream, cakes, candy, all kinds of goodies—oh, boy!

But it was a hot night. I had not been in there long before I felt as though I just had to have a breath of that cool river breeze. So, while everybody was laughing and talking, I slipped out unnoticed. I went out the front door onto the deck and turned and walked around the cabin toward the rear. I was hoping Shadow Loomis would take a notion to come outside, as I would like to sit out here and talk with him a while. But I could see him as I looked through the window, and he was so interested in the ice cream and Bill Darby's sister Lillian that I knew he was going to stay as long as the party lasted. I had just noticed that there was another vacant chair at the table inside, when I bumped against someone in the dark.

"Good Lord!" I exclaimed with a sudden fright. "Who is it?"

"Hush, Hawkins," came Harold's voice. "What brought you out here?"

"The heat," I said. "It's too hot in there. I've got to have air or I die."

"Sit down," said Harold, pulling a deck chair up beside his. It was more of a campstool than a deck chair, except that it had a back to it. I sat down and leaned back. "Now," said Harold, "this is fine. Bully breeze on the river."

"Something else beside breeze," I said. "Look yonder at Pelham. It seems as though our neighbors across the water are anxious to find out what our feasting is about."

Harold bent forward and peered through the dark toward Pelham. There was no moon, and the light from the windows of the boat made it seem darker over the side. A few lights were moving here and there on the Pelham shore. It was too dark to make out who carried the lanterns. There seemed to come to me once the sound of an oar splash which sounded very near our boat. I told Harold of Briggen's visit in the afternoon. He looked very interested. He turned to me, and I could see, even in the darkness there that his face had a worried look.

"Hawkins," he said, in a low voice, "I am going to leave to-morrow, and so is Ollie and Link and Will Standish. It will leave you with only a few boys—"

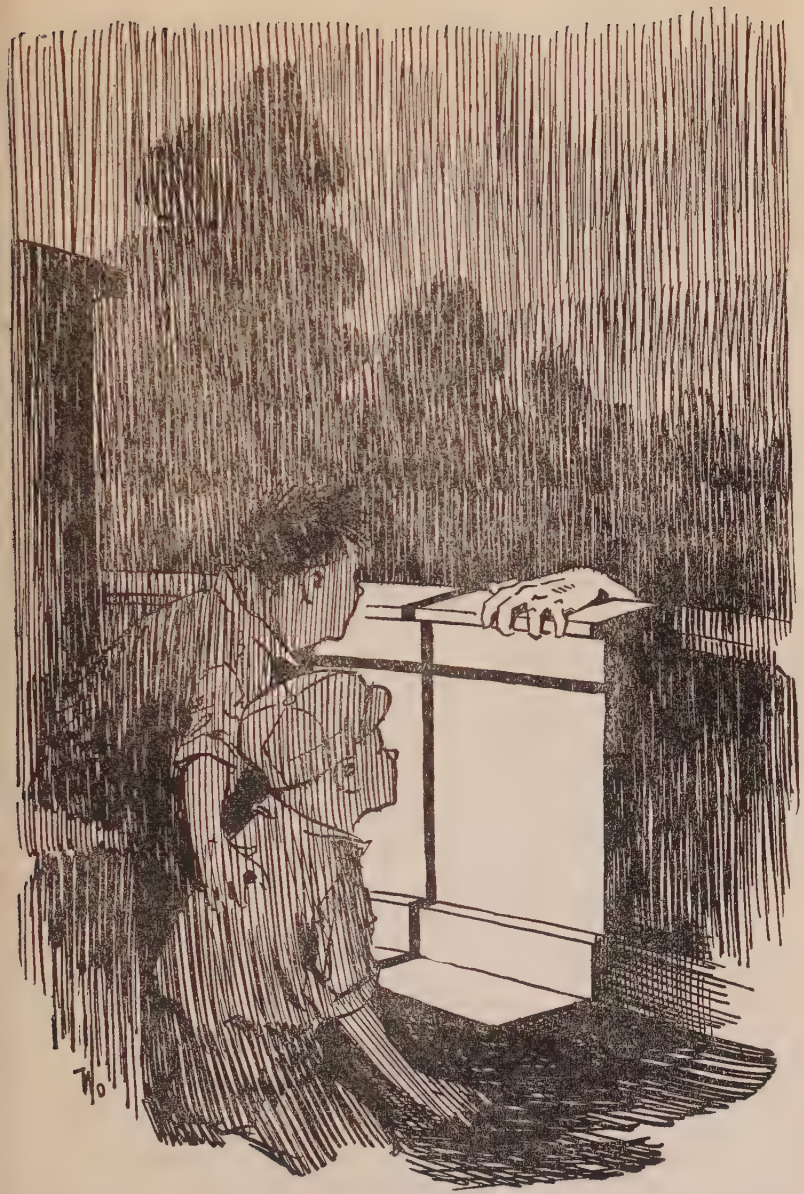
"I'll manage," I said. "I'll get by. There's only one thing that worries me."

"Harkinson?"

"Yes, I seem to feel that he has come back, Harold. I believe he is here. I can feel it. I would not be surprised if—"

Harold clapped his hand over my mouth and cut off my words. There was a sound below us on the water. We rose silently from our chairs and backed close to the wall of the cabin and held our breath. The light from a window of the boat streamed upon the rail in a yellow patch. While we watched we saw a hand raise itself over the gunwale. We stood there, crouching, as though we were unable to move. I knew that hand that was grasping our gunwale. It told me that before another minute passed we would be facing the one we feared would come.

The next moment Harold moved. In a flash he came back with a wooden pin that had been set in the rail, with a light coil of rope wound around it. He



"WHILE WE WATCHED, A HAND RAISED ITSELF OVER THE GUNWALE"

raised it swiftly and brought it down twice in rapid succession upon the ugly big hand that grasped our gunwale. It disappeared, and we heard a splash in the water below.

Without looking to see, we hurried inside the boat just as good-nights were being said. No one seemed to have missed us. We said nothing.

XII

The Red Runners

SCHOOL had opened again, and we were all busy with our studies. No longer could we meet every morning in the little clubhouse in the hollow. From now on until next summer we would have to hold our regular meetings each day after school. Link Lambert and Will Standish had gone and so had the twins, Oliver and Harold. There were only eight of us left now—Dick Ferris, Lew Hunter, Bill Darby, Jerry Moore, Johnny McLarren, Roy Dobel, Perry Stokes, and myself.

I had not told any of the boys about the fellow who tried to climb aboard the new launch the night we had the party. Neither had Harold. I did not want them to think that we might have to put up with Harkinson again. But it did worry me. When Link or Harold was with me I always felt as though I had somebody whom I could depend upon to help me watch out for such fellows as Harkinson and the Pelham boys. But I was worried now, because I felt sure we would receive some sort of a visit from Harkinson sometime, and there was I alone to figure out a way to beat him at his own game. I tried to get Jerry Moore and Bill Darby interested enough, but they seemed interested only enough to be afraid. So I thought of one fellow who used to be a great side partner to me—Robby Hood! If I could only get him down here with us again he could do a lot for us. He was a boy who could think, and who did think when time came for hard thinking. I called Perry Stokes into my little writing-room adjoin-

ing the clubhouse and asked him if he knew where Robby lived.

"Yes, sir," he answered. "In Watertown, by the little bridge."

"Take this note to him," I said, "and put it in his hands. Don't give it to anybody but Robby. If you can't find him, bring the note back to me."

Perry set off with the note. I wrote Robby that I wanted to talk to him, and that I would wait for him in the clubhouse until he came. It was after school when Perry started off with a canoe for Watertown. We held our meeting, and then the boys went out for the usual game of ball. I joined and played for an hour, and then went up to my little writing-room to finish a letter I was writing to Uncle Lucio.

Half an hour later Perry came in. He had made the trip very fast, and I could tell by his heavy breathing and the perspiration on his face that he had paddled fast.

"Well," I said, "did you find him?"

"Yes, sir," answered Perry. "I gave him your note, Hawkins."

"Well," I said, "I guess he has a good reason for not wanting to come. What did he say?"

"Oh, he is coming, sir," said Perry. "He told me to say that he could not come while it was daylight. Said he would come right after supper. He wants you to be waiting for him here."

"All right. What else did he say?"

"He asked me about you, how you looked since you got back, and how you liked Cuba. I couldn't answer all his questions, Hawkins. I told him you would tell him everything when he came down here."

"Where did you find him, Perry?"

"He was in his workshop, sir. He has a nice shed behind his father's factory. He makes all kinds of things. He has a wonderful workbench and fine tools. He's built a motor boat. You should see it. It's a beauty."

"All right, Perry. You did fine. Thanks for going."

"Don't mention it, sir."

Perry ran out to join the boys, and I finished my letter and sealed it up, and then called the boys. It was growing dark and time for them to be going home. I told them I would be down at the clubhouse after supper if any of them cared to come down. I had the key these days, and no one was allowed in the clubhouse unless I was around to keep an eye on them. Dick had asked me to keep the key. Dick was a good Captain, but he always felt a little bit afraid that he couldn't manage things to suit us boys. He had been elected Captain more than a year ago, and he always tried to keep the boys together and out of mischief; but when it came to anything outside of the regular meeting in the clubhouse Dick always came for advice.

So when we had returned from our camp on the island Dick had asked me to keep the key of the clubhouse. Our exciting adventures on the island were enough to make Dick understand that trouble from Harkinson might come again. Dick was a smart boy.

Perry was out at the gate waiting for me when I finished my supper and started down to the clubhouse in the hollow. He had taken a liking to me, Perry had, and he always tried to show me that he was glad that he was allowed to be in our club. So I walked with him down the river path and unlocked the clubhouse and lit the lamps. I took the rifle out of the cupboard and handed it to Perry.

"Here," I said, "you'll have to be watchman for me, Perry. This gun isn't to shoot with, you understand. It's just to scare anybody away from here who has no business around our clubhouse."

"Pelham and such," said Perry, nodding.

I smiled as he went out to take his stand in front of the clubhouse, and I thought to myself that it would not be a good thing for anybody to try to break past Perry Stokes. But I had seen to it that the gun was not loaded. I knew that in Perry's hands it did not have to be loaded. He would turn anybody away without the need of a gun, and if he did come to a point where he needed it he could use it as a club just as well. I was yet to learn what a valuable lieutenant Perry Stokes was to be.

It felt strange down in the clubhouse at night. The everlasting sound of the crickets in the high weeds and the bass-fiddle voices of the frogs in the marshy places came through the window like a duet. A screech owl somewhere in the tree that hung over the back window sang his chilly notes from time to time. Across the river a Pelham dog barked. From the southward came the deep sound of a steamboat whistle. Outside of that it was a quiet night.

I grew tired of waiting. I began to fear that Robby Hood was not going to come. Perhaps he could not get away, after all. Ever since the excitement last year with the terrible accident to Stoner's Boy, Robby's father had been against his coming down here at all. But I thought all that had blown over. I did not think that would hinder him.

I heard a sound out on the porch at last, and thought that he had come. But it was Bill Darby and Jerry

Moore. A little later Lew Hunter and Dick Ferris came in. It was the first time we had come down to the clubhouse at night. They all seemed to enjoy it, and it seemed to mark the end of summer, too, for the first thing they got out were the checkerboards, and before long two games were going strong in the front room of the clubhouse. I sat still in my writing-room and waited.

It was no more than five minutes later when there came a light step on the porch, and the front door was hurriedly opened and in rushed Robby Hood!

There he was. The same old Robby, only he was dressed different. The first time we had ever seen Robby he wore velvet breeches and a feather in his cap. No more of that now. Smart city clothes and a gray check cap. The boys in the front room leaped to greet him. But he held up his finger and said:

"Hush! Where's Hawkins?"

I stepped out as quickly as I could and grabbed him by the hand.

"You old Seckatary!" he exclaimed. "Look just the same. Never changed a bit since I saw you last. Gee, it's good to be back here again."

"Let's have a song," suggested Lew Hunter, going toward the organ. But Robby held him.

"No, not just now, if you please, Lew," he said. "A little later, maybe. You boys go on with your checkers. Looks like you can jump Dick's king here in a minute, Lew. Finish the game and then we will sing. I want to have a little talk with Hawkins."

I led him back to my little writing-room as the boys sat down again to their games. He looked around at my little office with a pleased smile.

"Hot dog!" he said. "You're way out there, Hawkins. This is swell, this is. The boys have this ready for you when you got back?"

"Yes," I said; "I like it, too. But I was getting sick and tired of it waiting here for you. Sit down. Let's talk."

I sat at the little desk. Robby walked over to the window beside my desk and pulled down the blind. "If it's all the same to you, Hawkins," he said, "let's keep 'em down."

I nodded, and Robby sat down across the desk from me. "All right," he said. "Tell me, what's the trouble down here now? Pelham starting something?"

"No," I said, "Pelham is all right. Watertown sends us most of our trouble now. Stoner was a bad egg, Robby, but he was nothing like a fellow who has showed up here this summer. I believe he used to chum with Stoner. At least one thing is certain: he uses that same old brass horn that Stoner used to blow around here to let us know he was going."

Robby sat looking at me with a pucker in his forehead. Then the next instant he was up and flew to the window, where he carefully pulled the blind a little to one side and peeped out. Then he walked back to his chair and sat down.

"I've got a little fight on myself, Hawkins," he says; "but I think I can handle it all right. Go on. What were you saying?"

"Robby," I said to him, "seems to me you've got something on your mind that won't help us any. Why do you go to that window and look out? Why did you want that shade down? Is there somebody after you? Do you think someone has followed you here?

"Think it? I know it," said Robby. "The whole

caboodle followed me here. That's why I was so long in coming. I started twice, and each time they saw me. The third time I gave them the slip. That is, I think I gave them the slip. But they're so darn slick, Hawkins, I'm never surprised when they turn up right in front of me."

Here was a nice mess. I was trying to get Robby Hood down here to help us keep out of trouble. And what had the bloomin' kid done but brought some more trouble right to our door.

"Who is it?" I asked. "Who is this caboodle you talk about? They seem to be as slick as Stoner's Boy ever was, if they can track you like that."

"Listen, Hawkins," said Robby, "it is Stoner's old gang. The Red Runners—that's what they're called —they each wear a red sweater, and they never walk unless they are forced to. Always running—always after somebody they got it in for, and this time it happens to be me."

"Who's the leader of this bunch?" I asked. I watched Robby closely. I had been thinking while he was talking. I had figured out that this was Harkinson and his pals.

"Long Tom," said Robby; "he is the leader since Stoner's gone. They're worse now than when Stoner was here."

"Ah, I remember Long Tom," I said; "I had hoped he was gone from Watertown."

"I wish he was," said Robby; "he and his side partner —a fellow named Harkinson—"

"I have met him," I said. Robby looked up in surprise.

"Ah," he said, "so Harkinson has been to visit you? No wonder you sent for me. Well, Hawkins,

you've sent for the right party. I know every hook and crook of these Red Runners. Wait till you see them. Harkinson is only a private in the ranks. It's Long Tom that has the say-so over the Red Runners. Harkinson had a spat with him about it this summer, and Harkinson left the gang for a while—"

"He came down here," I interrupted. "He picked himself a job with the Pelham boys. He bossed them around until they called on us to chase him off."

"Which you did," said Robby. "Well, then, no wonder he has it in for you. Hawkins, you can make up your mind that if this fellow has a grudge against you—"

"Yes," I said, "I've thought that all out, Robby. I want you down here with me. I know we will have to use our wits against Harkinson's, and Long Tom, too, if he can get that bully to join him. That's what I wanted to talk over with you."

Robby laughed.

"Well," he said, "it seems that we are both in for it, and we might as well work together. I'll have to be off now, though; it's getting late. You may not hear from me for a few days. But I'll keep my eyes open for these birds; if I hear of anything you should know I'll come down. I hope to be with you boys often now, Hawkins."

"I wish you could," I said. Together we walked out and Robby said good-bye to the four checker players in the front room. Then we went out on the porch and down the steps. A bright moon was shining, and a shadow fell across the moonlit path as Perry Stokes stepped up to us, his gun upon his shoulder.

"Come along, Perry," I said.

We three walked down to the river together.

"I had to paddle down," explained Robby, "because

I feared they would hear my motor. But I guess I'll risk it going back. It's hard work paddling a heavy boat upstream."

He crawled under the willows, and, as we stood upon the bank and watched, a dark, narrow skiff shot out from under the willows. I saw it was a skiff with a motor attachment. When he had gone a fair distance he slid to the stern and there came to us the rat-tat-tat of the motor as the boat leaped forward. I was just congratulating myself that Robby had got away safe when I felt Perry's hand upon my arm, and I was pulled back into the shadows behind a tree.

"Look!" whispered Perry.

There, on the ridge of the river bank was a line of running figures—like silhouettes, gliding past in single file, and I recognized the two in front as Long Tom, whom I had not seen for many months, and the long-armed, ungainly Harkinson. They ran without making a sound, as though they barely touched the ground. And, truly, I had never seen boys run so fast or so quietly. I did not think to count them, but there must have been a dozen. They sped past like shadows in the moonlight. Each wore a red sweater and an oddly shaped cap. I knew they had seen Robby start up the river in his boat. I did not know how fast that boat of Robby's was, but I knew it would have to be a good motor to travel faster than the Red Runners.

A clump of bushes this side of the bend hid them from our view. Perry looked at me and said: "Shall we follow?"

"Follow!" I said. "Follow our nose and turn that homeward."

Which we did.

XIII

The Silver Cup

"THERE'S somebody to see you, Hawkins," said Jerry Moore, as I walked up the steps of our clubhouse porch. "Robby Hood brought them here about ten minutes ago. I told 'em to wait for you in your writing room."

"Thanks, Jerry," I said, and hurried on into the clubhouse and back to my little office room. Robby Hood and two other boys were sitting there.

"Hello, Robby," I said, "I'm glad to see you still alive. I suppose you've been too swift for the Red Runners?"

Robby laughed. "Did you see them the other night?" he asked. "By Jingo, Hawkins, I had to pray hard that the motor wouldn't stop on me. I'd have been a goner if it had. Of course, I beat them all the way. But, say, meet Jerome and Kendricks, two friends of mine."

I stepped forward and shook hands with the two new boys. Robby went on talking.

"They're the leaders of the Happy Days Club up in Watertown. They've got a little trouble they asked me help 'em out with, and it's got me stumped. I knew you were good at figuring out things, Hawkins, so I told them we might come down and talk to you about it."

"Sure," I said, "I'm always glad to help. But I'm afraid I won't be any more help at figuring out this thing if it has stumped you, Robby."

"Wait and let Jerome tell you. Go ahead, Jerome."

The light-haired fellow to whom Robby had spoken brought his chair a little closer to my desk and began:

"Perhaps you have heard of our baseball team, the Happy Days nine. We lost but one game the whole season, and we won the silver-cup trophy. It was a great show in our clubhouse for the past two weeks. But it has been stolen."

"Ah," I said, "I see. You think I'm going to be able to tell you who took it? Now, listen, you boys are welcome to my help when you can use me, but, for goodness sake, give me something easy. How on earth—"

"Wait a minute, Hawkins," interrupted Robby Hood. "Let Jerome tell you all about it first. Then, if you don't think you can help 'em, why no harm's done."

"It was this way," continued Jerome. "The cup was on its shelf two days ago. When I left our clubhouse at supper-time I took a look at it, and I know it was there. The next day, after school, we met as usual. I was the first one to notice that the cup was missing. The leather case on the shelf where it had stood was empty."

"You searched the whole place?" I asked.

"Yes, everywhere. The silver cup was not found."

"You have no idea who took it?" I asked again.

The boy called Jerome motioned to the other who was called Kendricks, and moved his chair back.

"Kendricks thinks he knows a little that might help to find the thief."

"I don't know whether it will or not," said Kendricks, "but I came back to the clubhouse after supper that evening. The cup was there then. I stayed only a little while, and then started for Jerome's house. He and I were going to a picture show that night. As I walked

up the street about a half a block from the clubhouse, I turned and looked back. I thought I saw a couple of boys looking up at the windows of our club. I believe all the boys in our school would like to join it if they could, but we only allow a dozen boys in the club. But the next day when Jerome discovered the cup was stolen I remembered these boys I had seen."

"Did you know them?" I asked.

"No," replied Kendricks, "I could not recognize them from that distance, anyway. There was only one thing that I could remember. One of the boys had his hand, his right hand, I think, tied with a white bandage. It seemed to be hanging in a sling, too, as though he might have a sore hand or sprained wrist."

At once an idea struck me. But I did not say anything to the boys about it. I simply said:

"Have you boys had any trouble with the Red Runners?"

Robby Hood laughed. "There's not a boy in Watertown who has not had some trouble with those red coats, Hawkins. Sure, the Happy Days Club knows 'em."

Jerome smiled, while Kendricks frowned.

"Once," said Jerome, "we had to give them a licking to teach them to stay off our baseball diamond. But they have never bothered us since."

"Well," I said, "I'll come up to your clubhouse tomorrow and take a look. Maybe I can help you a little. You know I will if I can. I am sure glad to have met you boys, and I hope you'll come down here and see us often. Robby, when will you be here again?"

"To-morrow," said Robby, "I'll come and fetch you in my motor boat."

And so they went back, and I sat there in my little

office and thought this over. The boy with his hand tied up, hanging in a sling—who could it be?—who, but Harkinson, of course. Harkinson it was who had tried to climb over our gunwale that night of Link's farewell party. But was it Harkinson? We did not know. Harold and I had been sitting there on the deck of the boat in the dark talking about Harkinson. When the hand came over the rail we thought it was Harkinson, of course. Harold gave that hand two sound blows with that wooden pin—blows that would have made the fellow who owned that hand tie it up in a bandage for a couple of weeks. Harkinson it was who had been sneaking around the Happy Days Club, and I began to think that this thing wasn't going to be hard for me to figure out at all. Of course, it must be Harkinson.

The next day after school we held our regular meeting, and Robby arrived shortly afterward with his motor boat, and together we went up to Watertown. The Happy Days clubhouse is a nice little place, but I can't say I like it as well as ours. It looks too much like town—right there on a street—I'd rather have our little old shack in the hollow near the river, with lots of trees all around. The boys were very nice. Robby must have told them I was a detective or something the way they watched me as I looked around. I felt funny.

Jerome and Kendricks showed me the shelf where the silver cup had stood. The leather case in which it had been kept was still there, the lid open. I stood on a chair and looked upon the shelf. It was covered with dust, and there were fingermarks on the left side, and on the right a smudge—that was made, of course, with the bandaged hand—Harkinson's hand that Harold had hit with the wooden pin.

"Here's your drinking water," called a boy from the

outside. Jerome went to the door and took a bucket from a fellow, and, as I turned to look, the boy spoke to me.

"Hi, Hawkins," he said.

"Hello, Booby," I returned.

Jerome gave the boy a coin—a dime, I think—and he went away. "Do you know him?" asked Jerome, laughing. "He's our handy man around here. We have him bring us water and run errands and things. He doesn't belong to our club, but he's a nice chap. Seems like everybody knows Booby Warren."

"I've almost forgotten him," I said. "I had to look twice to make sure. He used to live down our way. But he moved away, and we haven't seen much of him since."

No more was said about Booby, and I began to ask the other boys of the Happy Days Club if they knew anything more about the silver cup. I didn't learn any more, however, and I saw that I might as well go back home. So I told the Happy Days bunch that I would let them know if I could tell them about their missing cup, and then I said good-bye, and Robby took me back home in his motor boat, promising to come back the following day after school.

That night Lew Hunter asked us to be down to the clubhouse for singing practice. Jerry and a few others didn't want to, but I told them it was right to keep up our practice, and Dick Ferris, our Captain, gave out orders that everybody should be present, and so there was no more objection to it.

Lew had the lamps all lit when we came down, and his music all set out, with every boy's song laid out on the table in front of his proper place. When we got started it was really lots of fun, and I think all the

boys were glad that Lew had ordered this singing practice.

While we were in the middle of a song we all liked very much the door flew open and in rushed Robby Hood. The singing stopped all at once.

"Quick," he cried, "the Red Runners—they're going for Pelham, Hawkins. I thought they were headed for your place. But I was mistaken. Come on, they're out full strong to-night—"

Our boys seemed to jump at his words. It seemed so long since we had a little excitement like this. "Wait, Perry," I yelled, as I saw Perry the last to leave. "Take this gun and stay here. When you see my canoe touch the other shore fire the gun just once. Then wait a minute and fire again. Just to frighten those fellows, if they can be frightened."

I sped for the river. The last canoe was pushing off, Jerry Moore and Bill Darby in it. I leaped in it lightly and said: "Paddle fast." It did not take us long to cross. There came the sound of shouts and running feet on the Pelham side. The moon was not bright, the sky clouded, but, just as we landed, there came the report of Perry's gun, and there was enough moonlight to show us a line of four or five shadowy figures running this way, while another four or five ran back into the woods behind the shacks. Our boys were by now darting into the shacks, and the Red Runners were flying before them. Then came the sound of Perry's gun once more, and the Red Runners seemed to have disappeared entirely, just as I thought they would. They did not know who was after them. They, perhaps, thought it was our Sherriff.

"Hawkins," whispered Robby Hood, coming round

"In the dim light I saw a fellow lying on the floor."

to where I stood, "look—shall we catch them or chase 'em?"

I looked into the Pelham leader's shack. A small oil lamp stood on a barrel in the center, and in the dim light I saw a fellow lying on the floor. Then I saw two other figures—red-coated boys—one digging into a wooden chest, and the other searching in an old, dilapidated safe that stood under a window. I started to enter the shack, and, as my footstep sounded upon the threshold, both redcoats turned—and I looked into the faces of Harkinson and Long Tom. For a moment I feared—but then I drew my gaze away and turned and yelled: "Here they are Sheriff. They can't get away. Stand up here close all you boys."

The trick worked. The two red-coats thought we had all our boys and the Sheriff behind us. They leaped for the first window and tumbled out. Robby was for running after them, but I held him. "Stay here," I said, "if you know what's good for you."

The footsteps of those fleeing night runners died out quickly, and they were gone. I went inside and lifted Briggen. Ham Gardner pushed his way up to me. "Is he hurt much?" cried Ham. "Hawkins, it was Harkinson again—"

"I know," I said, "but they didn't hurt your pal. They just shoved him over."

I let Ham take care of him, and our boys backed out and let the rest of the Pelhams come in. Suddenly Briggen opened his eyes and asked: "Are they gone, Ham?" Then I saw that he had been playing possum all the time. I saw something else, too, and it made me stop still for a second and look—

Briggen's right hand was tied up with a bandage!

"Come," I said to our boys, "we will go back." So

we all got into our canoes and crossed the river to our side. I knew that the Red Runners would not bother the Pelhams or us any more that night. I tried to get Robby to stay all night with me, but he would not do it, saying his mother would worry about him. So we waited fifteen minutes, and then, when we watched his motor boat turn the upper bend of the river, we locked our club house and went home.

The next day after school we held our regular meeting. Perry Stokes was a sort of watchman these days, as I had told him to keep an eye on Pelham. And he came up after the meeting and while I was writing the minutes, and said: "A Pelham boat is starting down the river."

"Who's in it?" I asked.

"Briggen and one other fellow," he answered.

"All right, Perry, come along."

We slipped down to the river and our canoe shot out of the willows just as the Pelham canoe was disappearing around the lower bend. We hadn't gone far until we caught sight of them again, but they were both facing front and never looked around, and I knew they did not think they were being followed. It was a silent chase to Seven Willows Island, where they landed, and leaped ashore. We followed close on their heels. I knew now where Briggen was going. To the loghouse in the stockade they had built last summer under Harkinson's orders. Both Pelhams went inside.

I hurried up to the door of the loghouse, Perry at my heels with the gun.

"Hello!" I hollered out loud.

Both Briggen and his pal turned—it was Booby Warren who was with him.

"I thought so," I said.

"Hawkins!" exclaimed Briggen, in angry surprise, "What right you got following—"

"Shut up!" I said. "What's that you've got under your coat—out with it. Perry, let Briggen look into the nose of that noisemaker you have—ah, I thought so, Briggen."

Briggen and Bobby had both thrown up their hands when they saw Perry poke the muzzle of the gun inside the door. And out from under Briggen's coat there slipped a beautiful shining thing—as lovely a thing as I ever saw—the silver cup.

. . . . . .

We forced Briggen and Booby Warren to tell us the whole story. Harold and I had been mistaken. It was not Harkinson who climbed up to the gunwale of the launch on the night of Link's farewell party. It was nosey Briggen—sneaking around as Pelhams always do to see what's going on over on our side. He had got the crack with the wooden pin on his hand that Harold had intended for Harkinson. I don't think Harold would have hit so hard if he had known it was only a Pelham fellow. But we had feared Harkinson. And Booby Warren, who used to chum with the Pelham boys when he lived down our way, had paid Pelham a visit and had told Briggen of the beautiful silver cup in the Happy Days clubhouse—and Briggen wanted it. Booby helped him. They carried it off together, but the Red Runners must have seen them make off with it. For I can't think what other thing they would have been rummaging around for in Briggen's shack, if not for the silver cup. Briggen guessed, too, that the Red Runners had somehow discovered that he had the cup; that's why he and Booby took it down to the loghouse on the island to hide it so they could not take it away from him. But

thanks to Perry Stokes, we had caught them at it, and everything turned out all right, anyway. I felt sorry, in a way, for Briggen as he stood there before us, his right hand wound around with a dirty bandage, and I felt that he had already had his punishment; he had got the blows intended for Harkinson, and so I told the fellows we ought to let him off this time with a good scolding. We gave him that, hot and heavy, and I warned him that if we ever caught him at such things again—

I told Booby to stay away from this part of the river forever.

"You found the cup, Perry," I said. "You get as much credit for it as anyone. There might be a reward. I think we should both go together and take it back to Happy Days."

Which we did.

XIV

Shadow Loomis Joins

WHEN we came down to our clubhouse after school the next day the sight that met our eyes made us sore. Somebody had visited our meeting place during the night. Somebody had turned it upside down. Somebody had given us a sign that we might expect trouble, and we knew that it could only be the Red Runners, whom we had frightened away from Pelham a few nights ago.

"Hawkins," said our Captain, "this is awful. What shall we do about it?"

"What can we do now?" I asked. "It's too late to cry about spilled milk, Dick. Come on, get the place straightened up."

All of us boys began at once to put the clubhouse in order. I was glad to find that none of the drawers of my desk had been opened. Our tin money box, in which we kept the dues, still rested in its place, and I opened it and counted the dimes to make sure there was none stolen. That part was all right.

"We will have to set a watch on the place," I said; "it's a cinch they came early in the evening. You'll never find a Watertown boy this far down the river after nine o'clock at night. None of us were down here at all last night. We all went home right after our meeting, you remember."

So it was that we appointed every boy in the club a watchman; each was to take his turn at keeping his eye on the clubhouse until nine o'clock at night. Roy Dobel drew the first watch, and he took his turn gladly

enough, but he reported everything quiet when he passed my house on his way home, and I felt satisfied that the Red Runners would not repeat their shameful ransacking. I felt in a way that they had only wished to get even for the scare we gave them the night we made them believe the Sheriff was upon their heels.

The next day while we were holding our meeting, a fellow walked into our clubhouse with a suitcase in his hand. All the boys were glad to see him. It was Shadow Loomis.

"Hello," he cried, "holding a little prayer meeting or something? I couldn't pass by without stopping in."

The boys ran up to him and shook his hand, and took his suitcase and pushed a chair up for him.

"Shadow," I said, "we are sure glad to see you. How come?"

"I'm going back home to Watertown," he said; "just got off the *Kentucky Belle* to see you fellows. The *Hudson Lee* will be along to-night, and I'll go up the rest of the way on her."

"Where's your friend, young Hudson Lee?" I asked.

"Gone off to school again," answered Shadow with a sigh. "I always spend the summer down there with him. Then, when his daddy ships him off to school, I got to go back to my old home town. Seems kind o' lonesome without him for a while, but I get used to it again, and wait for another summer-time."

He asked about the Pelham boys then, and we told him of our adventure over on the Pelham side the night the Red Runners came.

"Red Runners!" exclaimed Shadow. "Good-night! Hawkins, have you got those boys on your trail?"

"What do you know?" I asked. "What have you found out about the Red Runners?"

Shadow Loomis laughed.

"Everything," he replied. "If they knew I was returning to Watertown to-night they would be at the wharf to meet me. I've spoiled more of their fun than any other fellow in Watertown. I believe there wasn't a boy beside me who would know where to find the hangout place of the Red Runners."

He told us, then, of his fights with these pals of Harkinson and Long Tom. We sat and listened as though he were telling us the most interesting story we ever heard. We were all feeling pretty well scared when he finished. Here was another one of our friends who had already met the Red Runners.

"But they'll not do much damage," said Bill Darby. "They try to bluff most always. Something like our Pelham fellows, I guess. I believe every town has a gang of boys like that, Shadow. The Red Runners up in Watertown and the Pelhams down here."

"Go 'way," said Shadow, "there's no bluff about the Red Runners. Why, you never saw a bunch of fellows work as fast and as slick. They finish anything they start out to do. And nobody can stop 'em. That's the worst thing. You can't find 'em if you look for 'em. And if you try to follow 'em they just disappear. Once or twice a couple of 'em were caught and punished. But never would they tell on any of the others. You couldn't make 'em talk. They know that if they gave the others away they would catch it sooner or later."

"Shadow," I said, "you'd be a great help to us. Why can't you join our club?"

"Now you're talking," said Shadow with a laugh, and he slapped me on the back. "I've been waiting for you fellows to invite me. Now, if you all are agreeable, why I'm with you."

The way the boys shouted "Yes! Sure! Fine!" I knew it was no use to take a vote on it. Shadow was one of us from that time on.

"Only," he said, "I'll not be able to be around here as much as you fellows. You see, my dad's strong on me learning my trade. I've got to work now. I've had a long vacation. But I'll be down here on and off, as you might say. That's be all right, won't it?"

"Sure," I said, "we've got another fellow who comes only sometimes—Robby Hood. He's from up your way. Do you know him?"

Shadow shook his head. "There's a lot of fellows in Watertown I don't know," he replied, "but if he's your friend, Hawkins, he's mine, too."

"He's coming down here to-night," I said. "I wish you could meet him."

"I'll be here till about 8.45, I think," said Shadow; "the *Hudson Lee* is a fast steamboat. She'll be on time, and I want to be here when she comes. Captain Lee told me he'd not wait a second, and if I wasn't at the wharf he'd go without me."

"That'll be all right," I said, laughing, I'll find you a place to sleep if you miss the steamboat."

"Ain't goin' to miss her," said Shadow.

With that Shadow waved his hand and said we had enough talk about Red Runners and such, and he opened his suitcase and got out a lot of odds and ends, and for an hour the boys were watching him do some of his magic tricks, which kept them all guessing. No matter how they begged him to tell them how it was done Shadow always put the trick away and pulled out a new one. That suitcase seemed to be full of nothing but magic, like some old wonder box you read about in fairy tales. . . .

Jerry Moore was on watch at the clubhouse that night. Shadow had supper at my house, and Perry Stokes called soon after, and we three went down to the clubhouse together. Perry never failed to show up when he thought I wanted him. I never knew a boy who was always as willing to do something for me as Perry Stokes was. And he seemed to enjoy doing it.

I had left the key with Jerry, and I was surprised when we came near the clubhouse to see that no lights were lit, and not a soul around. I wondered about that, because Jerry was always on the job. We walked softly up the porch, and when I tried the door it gave way and we entered. "Strange," I said, softly, "door open and Jerry not here. Where in the world—"

"S-sh," came a sound from the rear in my writing room. "Come here," whispered Jerry. There he was, sitting in the dark, by the open window, looking out across the space that lay between our clubhouse and the river. "Don't light the lamp," he whispered.

"What's the matter?" I asked, in a low voice.

"I don't know," answered Jerry. "I saw someone—down by the river bank—just a while ago—there it is again—"

We stood behind his chair and bent our heads to peer out into the dark. There was no moon, but it was a clear night and the stars were out in full force, and we could see very plainly a shadow moving in the trees that lined the ridge of the river bank. It was the figure of a boy darting from the dark shadow of one tree to another farther down the bank. "He must have been away up here by the clubhouse," whispered Jerry. "I only saw him first as he darted to that old locust tree."

"Spy," said Perry Stokes. "I'll bet he wears a red sweater."

"The Boy Stopped Short For An Instant And Looked At The Strange Thing That Lay Before Him."

"Good-night," I said, "if there is some trap to catch Robby to-night—"

"Let me give them a little scare," said Shadow Loomis. Where's my suitcase?"

He went over to the table and dragged out from under it his traveling bag. "I'll guarantee to scare any Red Runner from here to Watertown," he continued, "if he can figure out whether this is a ghost or not—"

"There he goes," spoke up Perry Stokes. "See—he disappeared down the bank."

Shadow Loomis brought out several long pieces of soft, hairy twine, and a wide-necked bottle. Silently we watched him push each string into the bottle and soak them with the watery-looking stuff it contained.

"He's back again," announced Perry Stokes, who still peered out of the window. "Hawkins, he's coming this way, sir."

"Let him come," said Shadow Loomis, "he'll get his money's worth. Now, you boys watch. I don't think you've ever seen this kind of a snake before."

He had one of the soaked pieces of twine rolled into a ball. I saw him snap a little black tip at the end of the rope. There was a little spark, and he sailed the thing out of the window into the dark toward the shadows under the trees. For a moment all that we saw was the spark lying where Shadow Loomis had thrown the rope. Then, suddenly it began to spread—that spark seemed to stretch out into a long, thin line of tiny flames, and began to wriggle just like a snake. The coming figure of the boy on the bank stopped short for an instant and looked at the strange thing that lay before him. Then that fiery snake seemed to start for that shadowy figure, and then as suddenly died out

and was gone. The figure on the bank had turned and disappeared.

"Got his goat," laughed Shadow Loomis, under his breath. "Nobody can figure it out the first time they see one."

"Look!" exclaimed Perry in a low voice. "Look! there are three boys—no, four, five—another. Oh, Hawkins! the Red Runners are all around."

Sure enough, there were shadowy forms now moving all through the trees. At the same time came to my ears the muffled sound of a motor boat from up the river. It was Robby Hood. I knew that rat-tat-tat of the little cheap motor he had fastened to his skiff. And he had said he would be here sure to-night.

"Harkinson's calling," whispered Perry, laying his hand on my arm.

"Yes," I said, as the winding notes of a horn—the old horn that used to belong to Stoner's Boy—came from the river bank. "They hear Robby coming—he's calling all the boys together. They're going to take Robby prisoner. Shadow, if you want to help us—"

"Come on," laughed Shadow, "we can't help your friend here—beat it for the river as fast as you can."

He led the way himself, pushing out the front door and down the path to the left, keeping in the shadow as much as he could. We followed at his heels. As we went we could see the Red Runners coming in every direction, from where they had been stationed, each to watch for the coming of Robby Hood. Now they ran swiftly, silently in single file, down to the point where the sound of Harkinson's horn came from. The rat-tat-tat of the motor boat grew louder, and a light showed around the bend—the little headlight that Robby carried on his

little boat. We stopped at a point fifty feet from where the Red Runners gathered on the bank. They stood back in the shadow as the little boat swung into our little wharf and made fast. Then, like a line of ghosts, they moved swiftly to the river and leaped silently upon Robby Hood as he stood, with back turned, making fast his boat. We heard one little cry of surprise as Robby felt them upon him.

Shadow Loomis sped out from his hiding place and I heard a snap as he scratched his fingernail upon the tip of one of those mysterious ropes and sailed it out toward the crowd of figures on the little wharf. He made a hissing noise through his teeth and raised his arm again and sailed another, and then another, the last one landing behind the Red Runners just as the first one began to glow in its full length and start wriggling toward the wharf. They had turned and were looking toward us, surprised at that hissing sound that Shadow continued to make through his teeth—then their eyes lit upon the long, wriggling things that slowly moved toward them—by now they had all begun to grow into blue flame—like long, ugly glow worms they wriggled their crooked lengths toward the wharf—

It wasn't Harkinson who cried out in fright—I'd known his voice—but it was one of the Red Runners who first showed a yellow streak—and then it seemed as if they could not get away fast enough. How they dashed, one into another, for the nearest way to escape those wriggling things!

It was the sound of the horn again that got them in order, and they pulled into line again and ran like the wind in single file up the river bank, disappearing into the shadows under the trees that line the stream. Shadow Loomis was laughing until tears were in his

eyes, for Robby Hood, too, was scared to death, and was down in his boat again, starting the motor, ready to get away from this place as quick as he could.

"Robby," I cried, "it's me, Hawkins—come back."

The sound of his motor stopped and he leaped upon the wharf again to meet us.

"Gee wiz," he said, "I didn't know what was coming off here, I ought to have known that I couldn't have slipped away from the Red Runners, but I felt like I was safe when I didn't see a single one of 'em at Watertown. I was all excited and then come those snaky-looking blue things—Great Scott, where did they go?"

"Burnt out," I said. "Here is the magician who turned the trick."

I introduced Shadow Loomis.

"You saved me from a good licking," said Robby, as they shook hands. "They've been laying for me for weeks. You don't know these Red Runners."

"Don't I?" said Shadow, with a laugh. He told, then, adventures with this strange bunch of boys, and it was a pleasant half hour we spent there on the river bank.

"Here comes a steamboat," said Perry Stokes.

"It's the *Hudson Lee*," said Shadow, "bound for Watertown. You'd better not try to go back in that motor boat of yours, Robby. We'll both go back on the steamboat. Captain Lee will be glad to take us."

"I'm glad to hear that," said Robby. "They'll wait to see my motor come back. They'll never think for a minute that I'm on the steamer."

The beautiful old steamboat pulled for our shore and landed just about the time Perry Stokes came back from the clubhouse with Shadow's suitcase. The two boys promised to come back soon and leaped upon the gang-

plank the minute it touched our wharf. We watched the steamer sail up the stream, and then Jerry Moore said:

"Well, my turn of watching is over for a while. It's been a wild night. Believe me, I'll dream of snakes all night. Let's lock up our clubhouse and hurry home."

Which we did.

XV

The Call of a Night Bird

JERRY MOORE always had a liking for a campfire. He never stayed in our clubhouse longer than he had to. Just as soon as the meeting was over he would be out and gone. Now the days were growing shorter. October days brought chilly weather, and I was not surprised to find, when I came down to the clubhouse after school, a thin ribbon of smoke coming up from behind the bushes on the river bank. It was a campfire, and around it sat all the boys listening to some story that Jerry was telling.

"Looks like old times, fellas," I said, walking up and spreading my hands over the fire; "I thought Jerry would have a fire going before long."

"I've just been telling the boys, Hawkins," said Jerry, "that the Red Runners have a spy down here. I saw him myself when I came down after school. I was the first one down here."

"It wouldn't surprise me, Jerry," I said; "but are you sure it was a Red Runner?"

"He wore a red sweater, Hawkins," replied Jerry. "But he was a stranger to me. Never saw him before in my life."

"No, I guess not," I said, "if they do send a scout down here, most likely they send one we don't know. To tell the truth, we only know Harkinson and Long Tom."

"Well, I made up my mind to catch him," said Jerry. "We've just got to make those red coats know that they

can't be sneaking around our clubhouse whenever they please."

"Meeting!" called Dick Ferris from the clubhouse. And so we all went up and took our places around the table and had our regular meeting. It was Monday, and the Monday meeting is the most important one in our club. No matter how many meetings on any other day a fellow misses, he's bound to be present at the roll call on Monday. For that is the day when the dues are paid, and a fellow who does not pay his dime regularly is likely to find himself out of the club.

We talked about the appearance of the spy that Jerry had seen. And our Captain, Dick Ferris, appointed groups of two and three boys each to search together in different parts of the woods as soon as the meeting was over. But nothing came of it that day. Each little searching party came back before dark to report that not a trace could be found of the solitary Red Runner. He had gone, most likely, before we set out in search of him.

The next day, while I was writing in my little office in the clubhouse, Doc Waters came in. I was glad to see him, for it had been a long time since he had been to see us.

"Hawkins," he said after a while, "you boys won't be getting into any more trouble like you had with Stoner's Boy, will you?"

"I hope not, Doc," I replied. "We wouldn't like to, anyway."

"Well," he said, "I know you have been fighting with that boy from Watertown, what's his name—"

"Harkinson."

"Yes, the bully that gave us trouble at our summer camp on the island. Now, he's a tough youngster,

Hawkins, and he runs with a bad lot of urchins—"

"The Red Runners."

"Yes, I've heard of 'em," continued Doc. "It came to me from somebody in Watertown, who told me about your discovery of the lost silver cup. That was a fine thing, Hawkins, your finding out who stole it and getting it back. But, when I was told, I heard also about your run-in with this red runnin' bunch from Watertown. I just want to warn you. If you boys ever get into trouble like that again, Judge Granbery will use his influence to have your dad send you away to a very strict school somewhere."

"I'll be very careful, Doc," I said; "I don't want our little club broken up. We have better times down here on the river bank than any fellows could have anywhere else. We will steer clear of trouble. But, of course, if anybody starts fighting us, we have to fight back. You wouldn't think much of a fellow who didn't fight back, would you?"

"No, that's all right," said Doc; "but sometimes they're too much for you. All I ask, Hawkins, is that you call upon me and the Sheriff when you need us. Don't take a chance."

"Leave it to me, Doc. When the time comes that we can't take care of ourselves you can bet your money that we will yell for the Sheriff mighty quick."

"And me," said Doc.

"And you," I assured him.

But I was hoping that we wouldn't have to do that. As Doc walked up the river bank I watched him through my window and I thought to myself that there never was a man who cared for a bunch of neighborhood boys as much as Doc cared for us. He sure was a prince.

That evening Lew Hunter held a singing practice in

the clubhouse, and Dick Ferris gave orders that all of the boys must come. The preacher had asked us to sing again in his choir on Sundays, and we liked to help the preacher out. He was a fine man, and all of us boys liked him. So they all promised to come. I got there a little ahead of the others, and sat down at my desk in the rear room and finished up the writing I had started when Doc Waters interrupted me that afternoon. It was very quiet. The air in the room seemed a little stuffy, so I opened my window and turned back to my writing. There came to me, after a little while, the chilly notes of a screech owl somewhere in the tree that hung over the back window. It bothered me. I had heard that mournful sound every night that I had come down to the clubhouse. And I did not like owls. It was the only bird I was ever afraid of around our river bank. As I listened to it again I suddenly thought to myself: What if that is not a real owl? Supposing it is the secret signal of the Red Runners calling one another. I felt a chill go up my back. My skin began to feel like gooseflesh.

But then came a relief when I heard footsteps on the porch, and I thought at last that some of my boys were arriving for the singing practice. I threw down my pen and pushed through the curtains into the clubroom—and there I stood stock still, and another chill shot up my spine.

Standing there, in the wide-open door, were two Red Runners—they wore long coats and hats pulled down over their eyes, but I could see through the open coats the red sweaters worn underneath. They made no move, but stood there with their arms akimbo, looking at me.

"Been a long time since we met, Hawkins?"

It was Harkinson. Those hypnotizing eyes that had held me spellbound several times before peered out at

"BEEN A LONG TIME SINCE WE MET HAWKINS?" IT WAS HARKINSON.

me from under the dark rim of his wide hat. He gave a short laugh and dropped his arms, and they hung almost to his knees. He was, indeed, a figure that would frighten a fellow. I could not speak.

"You don't remember my pardner, here," continued Harkinson, waving an arm toward his companion. "Well, he remembers you, don't you, Long Tom?"

I bent my head forward at his words and gazed under the brim of the other hat. Yes, it was Long Tom. The same Long Tom who came in the old days with Stoner's Boy. The same Long Tom whom I had outwitted many times. He shoved his hat back upon his head and said:

"Take a good look, Hawkins, and you'll know me. It's been a long time, but that's my middle name. Long Tom—yeah, I waits a long time, but I gets what I go after. You and me got a few things to settle, ain't we, Hawkins? How'd you like to take a trip with us? You might as well like it, cause we came to fetch you to a party that we hatched up just for you—ain't nobody else but you gonna be honored in it—and the Red Runners will do the entertaining."

"Where do you want to take me?" I asked. I thought I had better play for time.

"We borrowed a boat with a motor in it," said Harkinson, "from your friend, Hood. It's waiting for you now. Put on your hat and hurry."

While I listened, hardly hearing what they said, I was trying to figure out a way to get out of this. If these two ruffians got me up to their hangout place in Watertown to-night I knew the least I could get away with would be a black eye and a bloody nose, and maybe have to walk all the way back. I felt myself sweating, yet I did not feel warm.

"Hurry," snapped Long Tom.

And, then, glory be to goodness, came the sound of laughter and my boy's voices; they were coming down the path. My two callers heard it at the same instant. Harkinson made a dash for me, but Long Tom hissed and jerked his arm.

"It's up," he whispered; "it's too late; they're all coming; let's beat it before they turn the tables on us." And, casting a mean look toward me, he snarled: "We've got plenty of time; we'll get you later."

"Not if I know it," I yelled as loud as I could, for my nerves were strained and I felt glad that my boys were coming back. Harkinson had dropped his hat, but he did not stop to pick it up. They slipped out into the dark and slammed the door after them. I picked up the oil lamp, rushed out onto the porch. They had disappeared in the dark under the trees. Coming around the corner of the clubhouse were my own boys, joking and cutting up as if nothing had happened. I made up my mind not to say anything to them, so that the singing practice would not be spoiled by worries of this kind.

"Thanks for the light, Hawkins," said Lew, laughing; "you must have thought we would stub our toe or something."

"It's pretty dark out there," I said. "I think we ought to have a light by the steps."

They came trooping in. They were getting the music sheets and songbooks ready while I walked back to my desk and put my book and things away. Through the window came the gloomy call of the screech owl in the tree. I hurried back to take my place by the organ. Lew struck up the first chord and the sound of the music drove away my fear. I was with my boys again. Nothing could hurt me now.

. . . . . .

We sang for almost an hour. At the end we sat down at the table while Lew was putting away the music and books.

"Listen," spoke up Jerry Moore. "That's a sign. Every time you hear that owl in the back tree there, you know the Red Runners are near."

"Ah," I said, "what have you learned, then, Jerry?"

The other boys seemed to be frightened. They looked with serious faces at Jerry.

"The same old call. Stoner used to use it. Listen! Hear it? Old flathead night bird."

"Hello, who does this belong to?" exclaimed Bill Darby. He had pulled out of the dark corner behind the organ the wide-brim hat that Harkinson had dropped in his flight. "Some hat, ain't it? How do I look, fellas?"

He put the wide hat upon his head. The drooping brim flapped over his ears. The boys laughed as Bill walked around. Then, just as he approached the window, a funny thing happened. There came the sound of fluttering, a flapping of ghostly wings, and Jerry gave a cry of fright as through the window came a shape—an evil-looking thing it seemed in the dull glow of our lamp—and it settled down upon the hat on Bill Darby's head. It was a small speckled owl! Bill hardly had time to see it, but he knew something was wrong, and he screamed and dropped to his knees. I saw Jerry Moore leap forward and make a swing at the ugly creature, but just then came through the window another sound —the sound of the old brass horn that Harkinson carried—and flappety-flap-flap out again into the night sailed the unwelcome bird.

"The horn—" shouted Jerry. "It's Harkinson and the Red Runners!"

I couldn't have stopped him if I wanted to. Bill Darby ran after him, and the other boys, recovering their courage, and anxious to see what might be going on, shot out of the clubhouse behind them. I followed after locking the door. I feared a trick.

Once more came the sound of the horn as we ran. I knew it was Harkinson calling in the other Red Runners who had been stationed in other places.

"There they are," whispered Jerry, as I came up to where he and the other boys had halted. We looked down, and on the bank we saw two figures waiting beside a boat, the motor already running. "Look!" whispered Jerry. "Look! Harkinson's shoulder—"

Against the moonlight was the dark figure of Harkinson, and upon his shoulder rested a queer little shape —I looked twice before I saw it was the owl.

"Oh, Lord," whispered Bill Darby, "it's his owl—it's Harkinson's—and it took me for him—"

There must have been only four Red Runners, for, as two others came running up, they hurried quickly, took their places in the boat, and Harkinson followed, while Long Tom shoved her off and leaped in as the motor carried her out into the stream. Long after the darkness swallowed them we could hear the rat-tat-tat of the engine.

"I might a'known that nightbird belonged to him," said Jerry Moore.

"And it mistook me for him," repeated Bill Darby.

"Sure," I said, "you had on his hat."

"What!" exclaimed Jerry. "Was he in the clubhouse?"

"Yes," I said; "don't get excited; it was only me they were after." And I told them of the visit of Long Tom and Harkinson while I was alone in the clubhouse. Bill Darby kept brushing his hair, as if he couldn't

forget that the horrid bird of Harkinson's had once roosted there. "To think of him having such a pet," said Jerry. "No wonder, though; I knowed he was some kin to such nightbirds. Whenever you hear an owl you can bet Harkinson ain't far off."

"You're right," I said.

"Have you locked the clubhouse, Hawkins?" asked Dick Ferris.

"Yes."

"Well, we better go up and close that window," said Bill Darby.

Which we did.

XVI

A Pair of Owls

IT WAS cold as the dickens when we came down to the river bank after school. All of us boys hugged the camp fire Jerry Moore had burning on the river bank. Across the river the Pelham boys had a fire burning, too. They always do everything we do. I wondered, as I watched them, why they had been so quiet lately. They haven't been over on our bank for weeks. Whenever they stay quiet like that for a long time I always begin to expect trouble from them. Now, I thought they were hatching something new for us; soon we would find out what they were up to.

Bill Darby had not been at school all day because he was sick. I was surprised when I found him sitting among the boys at the camp fire.

"Bill," I said, "if you're sick enough to stay home from school you ought to stay in the house. It might be bad for you to be down here on the river bank."

"I dunno," said Bill, "seems like school is the worst place for a fella when he's sick. Seems like a place out here on the river bank does a fella lots of good when he's sick."

The roll call was answered by all but Roy Dobel. We talked about the last visit of Harkinson and the Red Runners, and Dick said we would have to keep a watch at the clubhouse. It was Bill Darby's turn, but he being sick, Perry Stokes offered to take his place, so Bill could go home early and take care of his cold.

Then the boys all stepped up to pay their dues. While I was marking it in the book Roy Dobel came in.

"Look, fellas," he said, "ain't he a fine fella? Harkinson ain't got nothin' on us."

All the boys looked surprised. Bill Darby yelled and put his hands on top of his head and held his cap on tight. Roy Dobel carried a parrot's cage, and in it was a big, brown owl.

"For the love of Mike!" exclaimed Jerry Moore, "what did you go and do? Steal Harkinson's pet?"

"Dry up," said Roy; "can't you see this is a wild one? I trapped him in my pop's barn. Look at his eyes. Harkinson's owl never had eyes as big as that."

We all crowded around Roy and looked at the stiff-looking bird he had in the cage. It was larger than the owl Harkinson had. The feathers on its head stuck up like two little ears.

"Let it go," cried Bill Darby; "set it free, Roy."

Bill hadn't forgotten the night Harkinson's pet owl sailed through the window and lit upon his head.

"Nix," said Roy, "this bird is gon'a be our mascot. Tell you what, fellas, an owl is good luck. It gives a fella a lot of power—don't you know how Harkinson can hypnotize with his eyes? Where'd you suppose he got that power from—from his brain? No, sir, he ain't got brains enough to keep him on the ground. It's his owl that does it. It's like a charm. Don't you always see fortune tellers and such have owls on their shoulders? Sure you do; they are magic. If we keep this old fella in our clubhouse, Harkinson won't be able to do anything to us, nor anybody else. You do it and see."

No use denying, Roy's words had a lot to do toward making the fellows like the bird, and the end of it was that the cage was set upon the cupboard, from which high

place the two glassy eyes looked down upon us with an empty stare. But, remembering our recent scare with Harkinson's pet night bird, I did not like to have this one around. I should have taken a better look at Roy's bird, I guess, but I did not. I just saw that it was almost twice the size of Harkinson's speckled pet, and then I paid no more attention to it.

The next day we learned that Bill Darby was really a very sick boy. Doc Waters came down to the houseboat and scolded us for letting Bill come down when we knew he was sick. I tried to make excuses, but Doc was very angry, and said that it was our duty to chase a fellow home when we knew he was sick enough to stay home from school. We promised on our honor that we would do so forever after. We all went up to see him, but he was very cross. Bill is that way. When he gets sick he's very cranky, and he told his mother to order us to go right back where we came from. Which we did.

Roy Dobel was on watch that night. The other fellows went to the movies, but I said I didn't care to go, and Lew Hunter went down with me to the clubhouse. Roy was sitting on the steps and jumped up when he saw us coming.

"How's everything, Roy?" I asked.

"All's quiet," answered Roy.

"Haven't heard a sound?" I asked.

"Only the owl in the clubhouse. He hoots. That's the sign he's a good owl. You never heard Harkinson's owl hoot, did you? No, he sort o' screeches. Owls's no good lest they hoots. Ours is a fine one."

I had to laugh, and Lew did, too.

"All right, Roy, keep your eye open."

Lew and I went inside. I went to work writing, and Lew got some of his music sheets out and practiced on the

organ. It sounded fine to me as I sat in my little office in the back and heard the strains of "Home, Sweet Home" come drifting through the curtain. But suddenly came the hoot of the owl in the cage on the cupboard.

"Did you hear him, Hawkins?" called Lew.

"Yeah, keep on playing," I answered, "so I can't hear him. Dern if I like owls, even if Roy does think they're good luck."

Lew laughed and kept on playing.

After a while I heard voices outside. Roy was talking with somebody. I hurried through my curtain doorway, but just then the door opened and in came Roy and Briggen, followed by two other Pelhams—Ham Gardner and Dave Burns.

"He's here," whispered Roy to me.

"So I see," said I. "Briggen and his—"

"No, no—" broke in Roy, "Harkinson—Briggen just come to tell us—his launch is landed down on the bank near the mouth of Cave River. They rowed down, so the motor wouldn't make any noise."

Then, for the first time, I saw that Briggen carried something—something that stood up from his arm, but was covered with a gray cloth. Gray—how that color reminded me of Stoner's Boy!'

"What's that?" I demanded, pointing my finger.

In a moment Briggen whipped off the cloth—Harkinson's little speckled owl sat perched upon his wrist. I drew back—I hated the thing.

"Where—" I began, "where—what's this mean, Briggen?"

Briggen grinned.

"We followed their boat," he said, "and they landed and tied her, and snuck off in the dark. This was sitting

on the steering wheel, but it was covered with the cloth. When we looked in under we saw it was the bird. So we just snatched it and brought it up to you. It's tame. See, it won't fly. It'll sit here as long as you want it to. We thought it would be a pal for your other bird up there."

He pointed to Roy's caged bird upon the cupboard.

"How did you know we had one, Briggen?" I demanded sharply.

He shifted his eyes from me to Roy, and from Roy to Lew, and back to me.

"Ah," I said, "you guys been spying around here while we were gone. I see. Just let me tell you, Briggen, I don't want any of you boys sneaking around here. Stay on your own side of the river and we'll stay on ours. What do you mean by bringing that stolen bird up here? You want Harkinson to think we swiped it? I know you. It would suit you fine if Harkinson would have something on us—"

"Aw, shut up," yelled Briggen, and he shook his wrist free; the speckled owl came flappety-flap for my head. Lew Hunter yelled. I ducked. The Pelhams had turned and were gone. We heard their footsteps on the path outside.

"Hot time!" exclaimed Roy. "Shall we take out after 'em, Hawkins?"

"No," I said, "get rid of this bird of Harkinson's. He'll miss it. And the whole Red Running bunch will be up here after it. Hurry."

We spent ten minutes chasing the measly thing. I hated to touch it, but I would be willing to do anything to keep Harkinson from thinking that we stole his pet. We had enough trouble already. But at last we realized that it was a hard thing to catch when it knew we were

trying to catch it. We sat down at last and looked at it. It perched on top of the cage where the big-eared owl sat staring. The big one moved its head just a trifle and uttered a gloomy "Hoot." The little one said: "Squee-wee-wee."

"Out with the lights," I said, jumping up. "Hurry, Lew. I'll bet it won't be long before he misses the bird."

"What'll we do about the dern thing?" asked Roy.

"Let it alone," I said. "If it flies out, so much the better. And to-morrow you get rid of yours, too, Roy. Come on."

I shoved them out the door, and pulled it shut and locked it. Then we slipped down the steps and around to the left, toward the river path. Something told me that already the Red Runners were too near for us to get away without being seen. So I drew my boys into the shadow, and not too soon, either, for up the river path came two dark shapes, but even in the night time I knew those shapes for Harkinson and Long Tom. They stopped beneath the window. I saw a flash of light move rapidly up the side of the shack as Long Tom snapped on his electric lamp. He held it close to the window pane, and together they peered in.

"They've got it," came in a whisper from Long Tom. "They've got it in a cage. Easy. Hold this light."

They worked at the window for a minute, then I heard the sash raised.

"Here y'are," whispered Long Tom again. "Put yer foot up. I'll give you a lift."

Harkinson's clumsy shape moved up and into the window. Long Tom turned the light upon the cage that stood upon the cupboard. The little speckled

bird no longer sat on top. Only Roy's captured bird was there for Harkinson. He worked at the cage so quickly, turning his head often to see that no one but Long Tom was below, that he did not, perhaps, realize that owls may look alike, and yet be different birds. Just what happened in there between Harkinson and the caged bird I cannot tell. I do know that there came a flutter of wings as Harkinson reached into the cage. Then came a yell from Harkinson, and the flashlight dropped from Long Tom's hand as Harkinson came tumbling through the window, and both boys rolled over the ground. They rolled a few feet away from the shack. Then Harkinson picked himself up and ran back, and, stooping, picked up the flashlight and turned it on. Something moved upon the ground below the window—a little round shape —Harkinson uttered a savage cry and brought the flashlight down with a thud. Long Tom was up and by his side by now. Together they looked upon the pile of feathers that lay in the circle of light that fell from the electric lamp. It quivered once, and then was still. I heard Roy give a smothered cry of angry surprise as the light disclosed his owl dead at Harkinson's feet.

"The thing got me," said Harkinson to Long Tom. "Seemed like it took half my finger. Lend me your han'kchif, Long Tom?"

" 'Taint your own, then?" asked Long Tom, as he wrapped his handkerchief around Harkinson's bleeding finger.

"Naw," replied Harkinson, "it fooled me, though. I'll get Becky soon's you tie up my hand. Gosh, how it bleeds. His old crooked beak dug right in. Lucky it didn't take the whole finger."

The hand wrapped, Harkinson drew from under his

long coat an old brass horn and blew a shrill blast upon it. It woke echoes all through the wood, and running feet, for the Red Runners began to come in, and flapping wings, for the pet owl knew that its master was calling—we saw the little speckled shape float out of our window as the notes of the horn died away. Harkinson called in a strange tone, and the pet settled upon his shoulder.

We crouched lower in the shadow of the steps as from the woods came the Red Runners in answer to the call of the horn. They huddled around their leaders for a few minutes, talking in low tones, and then Harkinson stooped and picked up Roy's dead owl and flung it through the window into the clubhouse. Then, silently, in single file, raced the Red Runners down to the river where their boat waited.

"What's the trouble?" called a voice from the path. It was Doc Waters. "I heard that horn, Hawkins. If I'm not mistaken I heard that before. It used to mean trouble. Come up out of that dark, will you? Tell me what's up."

I felt safe with Doc. "Come in," I said, and we unlocked and lit up. I told Doc as quickly as I could what had happened. He listened with a frowning face.

"How many times must I tell you not to take chances, Hawkins?" he asked when I finished. "Some of these days one of these Watertown boys—"

He stopped as his eyes caught sight of the dead owl upon the floor, where it had fallen when Harkinson threw it in the window.

"Great Scott!" he exclaimed. "Where did—whose is that?"

"That's one of the owls I was telling you about. Roy trapped it in his pop's barn—"

WE SAW THE LITTLE SPECKLED
SHAPE FLOAT OUT OF OUR WINDOW

"Well, if that ain't one of the finest horned owls I ever saw—that's the first time I ever saw one around here. Say, boys, Judge Granbery would give a ten-dollar bill for that bird and have it stuffed—"

"We will take it up to his house right away," I said.

Which we did.

XVII

Seventh in Line

THERE were two fellows in the group sitting around the campfire that I was glad to see when I came down after school for the regular meeting. Robby Hood and Shadow Loomis were there, talking with the other fellows as if they were perfectly at home.

"Hi, there," I called. "Looks like we will have a full house for one meeting, anyhow."

They got up and came to meet me, and they looked happy.

"Heard about your escape from Harkinson and Long Tom," said Shadow. "The boys were just telling us."

"And about the owls, too," added Robby Hood, laughing.

"Hot times we've been having," I said. "Where in the world do you fellows keep yourself? We thought sure you would come to our meetings once in a while."

"They was afraid Lew Hunter would make 'em sing," said Jerry Moore.

"Can't be a member lest you join the singing practice," said Lew Hunter.

"I've got a fine voice, Lew," said Shadow, with a grin. "I think I sing falsetto, or something like that."

"You'll have to join the Pelhams, then," said Lew. "They're the only ones that sing false around here. They're false in and out, everything they do."

"Let 'em be," said Shadow; "let 'em be. Gee, I'd like to have one of 'em say something smart to me. I'd make him like Pelham better than this side of the river."

"How about the Red Runners?" I asked. "What do you know about them, Shadow?"

"They're still running," said Shadow. "I've managed to keep clear of 'em so far; but Androfski's sworn that he will get me yet, no matter how I dodge him."

"Androfski?" I repeated; "that's a new one on me, Shadow. Who's this Androfski?"

"You've seen him if you ever saw the Red Runners," said Shadow. "He's the third one in the line as they run —first comes Long Tom, then Harkinson, then Androfski. You might call him the third leader. You see, they always run in the order of their importance. When Long Tom and Harkinson are away, Androfski is the boy who takes charge."

"They sure do keep order," said Dick Ferris. "If I could keep my boys in line like that, and make them jump and run when I blow a horn, we'd be able to do anything."

"What's this Andrewski got against you, Shadow?" I asked.

"Androfski, I told you his name was," replied Shadow. "Robby's acquainted with him, too. He's just naturally mean, Androfski is; not that he has anything on Harkinson or Long Tom at that. But he never forgets the time I caught him swiping the milk from our front porch. Maw had been missing it for a week, and I got up earlier than usual one morning and laid for the thief. In a little while this greasy Androfski came sneaking around. I let him get away the first time. I though maybe somebody else had been doing it the other mornings. But the next morning I caught him as he was lifting the bottle —he hit me with the dern thing and made me look like I was whitewashed when he broke the bottle on my head

and the milk went over me. I had an awful lump on my bean for a week. But you ought to see what Androfski had for two weeks. Yeah, I did him up proper, and he ain't forgot it. Only a week ago a brick dropped off a roof and fell a few feet from where I passed on the sidewalk. I looked up just in time to see Androfski jerk his greasy face back from the edge of the roof. Then I crossed the street and went on up the other side."

"You don't say!"blurted out Jerry Moore. "Does he—do those Red Runners play such dangerous games?"

"Games?" repeated Shadow. "Some game, I calls it."

"I'd tell the Sheriff on him, I would," said Johnny McLarren.

"I did. I thought I ought to, because he might pick out some other fellow, you know, a guy who might not be able to care take of himself like I always do. And the Sheriff heard something about the Red Runners that made him mad. Anyway, he told us that we would be doing him a favor if we would capture the leaders and turn 'em over to him. Didn't he, Robby?"

"Yeah; yesterday he told us. That's why we came. We thought we ought to talk this over. Maybe we will get a chance to nab the whole bunch, or two or three of 'em, anyway."

"Come up to the clubhouse," said Dick Ferris; "it's time to hold our meeting."

It was Perry Stokes's turn to watch, and he stayed on the river bank while we went up into the clubhouse and held our meeting. The boys all paid their dues, and Robby and Shadow paid what they owed for the last few weeks they missed. Our little tin treasury box is getting rich again. I think we might be able to save a nice little sum. But most likely, when we do, something will

come along and cost us a big pile, and blooey! Treasury is only a tin box again.

We talked about how we would watch and wait for the time when we could capture the Red Runners all together when they least expected it. Shadow said it would be best that way, because, if we did catch only one or two the others would be mighty careful not to get into such a net again. But Shadow said if we could only get one or two we would do so and take a chance. Robby Hood said it wouldn't be an easy job, and I agreed with Robby. Jerry Moore talked as if he could do it single-handed, catch the whole bunch himself, and make 'em goose-march right to the Sheriff. But Jerry always like to tell stories. He always used to read fairy tales to Little Frankie Kane. Now he doesn't read 'em any more, he makes 'em up himself.

"Hawkins," said Shadow to me, as the meeting broke up, "Robby's been telling me about that wonderful Cave River in which so much happened down here. I'm dying to see that there river, buddy."

"Good night!" I said. "We've been steering clear of it, Shadow. So much trouble came to us in the old cave. That's where Stoner—"

"I told him about that," said Robby Hood; "but it's all past now. Let's take Shadow up and show him the river. I bet you never saw a river go into a cliff like this does, Shadow."

"No," said Shadow, "it must be fine. That's why I want to see it."

We took two canoes and paddled down the river, Dick Ferris and I in the first one, and Shadow and Robby in the second. Dick looked a bit gloomy.

"My pop would lam me if he knew I was going in there," he said. "How about you, Hawkins?"

"Same here," I answered; "but I got to oblige a friend. I'll just have to hope that pop don't find out. And if he does, why, I guess I just have to take that risk, Dick."

The willows still hung over the old mouth of Cave River. It was a year since I had seen the old place, but, now that I got close to it, I felt a strange wish to see inside it again. How many times—how many strange memories that old place brought back—and thoughts of the Skinny Guy—

"The water's high, duck your head," called Dick Ferris to the canoe behind, as we shot under the willows and through the low arch of Cave River's doorway, and we were in the gloomy cave under the cliff. The sound of water running through and the dripping from the ceiling was all that came to our ears after we had passed through the low doorway that separated us from the outside world. We could hear the paddling of the canoe behind us. Then the rays of our flashlights began playing up and down the sides of the cave.

"Some hole this is," called Shadow Loomis. "Wouldn't think it was here if you didn't know it, would you?"

His voice sounded hollow, and the echoes came back double from the far corners of the cave. We paddled on in silence till we reached the flat table rock that stood on the left side of the Cave River. Here we jumped out and pulled up our canoes. For five minutes we stood there, our lights turned on the long, hanging points that looked like icicles, and which threw back rays of different colored light. We told Shadow of our strange adventures in this part of the cave; of the Skinny Guy's tricks, of the Chinese magic, and all those things about which I wrote a long time ago. Shadow seemed to be

enchanted; he was so surprised to find a place like this here on our own home grounds.

And just as I was telling him that scarey part of the Chinese magic there came a sound that startled us all into fits. It was as though a few stones had been loosened and tumbled down from some of those galleries that ran around above us among those hanging icicle things. That was all. We heard them skip down and down until they landed with a splash in Cave River. We all put out our lights in a hurry.

"Somebody is up there," whispered Robby Hood. "He can't be one of your boys, can he Hawkins?"

"No," I whispered, "none of 'em's allowed to come here. May be a Pelham. Shall we sneak up and take a look?"

"No," said Robby, "he has to come back this way to get out. We will wait here."

"There's another opening," I said, "up above—it opens out through a little hole in a hillside on the main road where a tree is growing out of the hill—"

"Listen," said Shadow, "I've been thinking about this here Chinese magic you boys saw in here—maybe you could have been mistaken. Supposing—"

"Jump!" yelled Dick Ferris. He had just turned on his flashlight again and saw it not a minute too soon. We jumped back as a big stone came bounding down from above us and splashed itself into the Cave River beside us.

"By Golly!" I cried. "That's too much. I bet it's a Pelham. Come on, you fellows, if you're game. I'm goin' to get him."

The echoes of our running feet as we sped across the table rock and started up the rock shelf that led up to the gallery under the ceiling; the flashing of our lights

as we hurried on; the sound of something or somebody ahead of us—

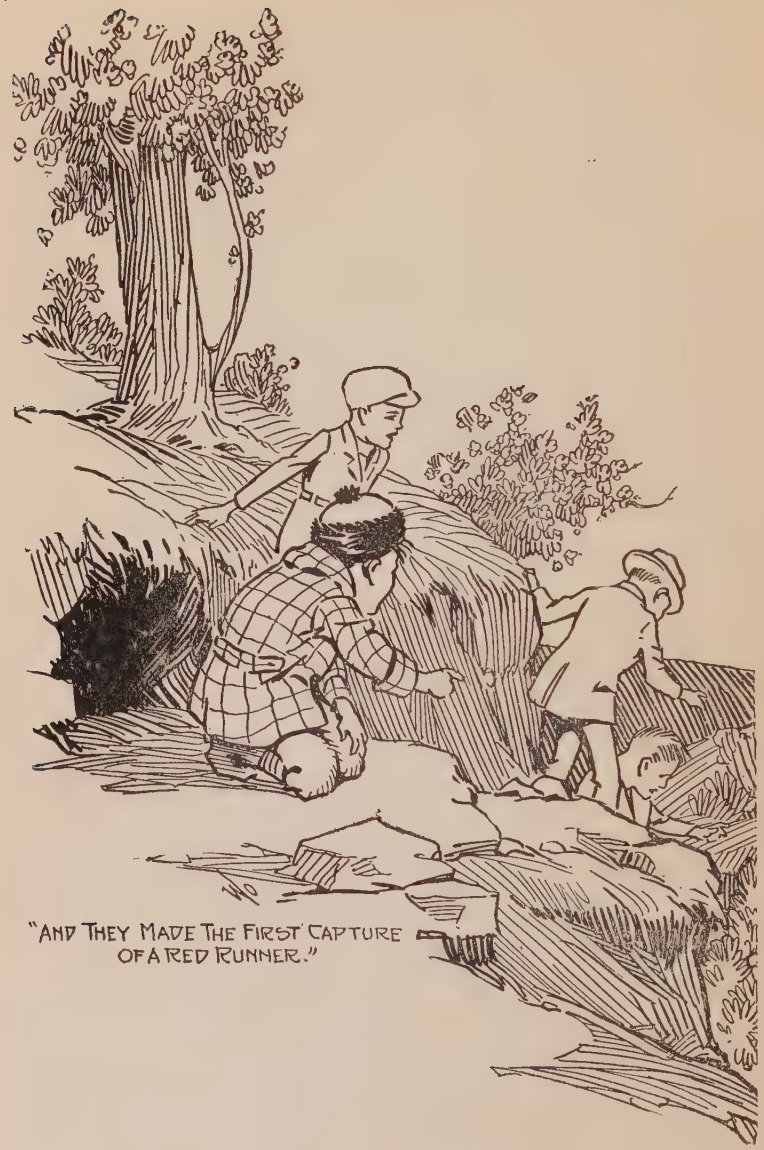
"There he goes," yelled Dick Ferris, "right through the hole."

"Don't let 'im get away," called Shadow Loomis.

Daylight was coming through a little hole in the side of the cave ahead of us. A shadow darkened it as we saw a boy squeezing himself through, but only for a minute, and then he was gone, and daylight streamed through the opening again. Shadow and Robby reached it first, and were through it by the time I came out, Dick at my heels. As I joined them they were standing there, looking at a running boy who had started back toward our river bank as fast as he could go. No use to follow, I knew. He could run, and why shouldn't he? He wore a red sweater—he was one of the Red Runners, who were famous for their speed, because they practiced running more than anything else.

But then we saw that red jacket slow up suddenly. I wondered why, but I saw the reason a second afterward. The reason was Jerry Moore, who headed him off, and behind Jerry was Johnny McLarren and Bill Darby and Perry Stokes. They ran for the Red Runner, but he turned in his tracks and started running back, and would have got away, too, but for us. He saw us coming down, and he was puzzled for a moment, and looked this way and that as though wondering which way was best to escape. That pause cost him dearly, for Jerry Moore is a pretty fair runner himself, and the way he fell upon that Red Runner brought them both tumbling in the sand. The Red Runner fought gamely but Bill Darby and Perry Stokes came to Jerry's side, and they had made the first capture of a Red Runner.

"Ah!" said Jerry, as we came up. He was sitting



"And They Made The First Capture of a Red Runner."

upon the fallen Red Runner, who had given in. "I knew there was a spy around here, Hawkins. And I told you I'd get him, too. Didn't I?"

. . . . . .

We were all sitting around the table in the clubhouse. Our prisoner stood before us, his hands tied behind his back. Perry Stokes stood at the door with a gun to prevent escape. Both Robby and Shadow stepped up to take a look at the Red Runner's face. "Never saw this one before," said Shadow "Me neither," said Robby. "They get new ones sometimes."

"What's your name, boy?" I asked. He looked sulky for a minute, but I smiled at him and asked him again: "What's your name, kid?"

"Lasky," he said, in a low voice.

"You're a Red Runner, I guess?" I asked again.

"Wouldn't do me any good to lie about that," answered Lasky; "you see my sweater. I'm proud to say it; seventh in line; that's me."

"Got 'em all numbered and everything," I said. "Fine business, those Red Runners got, and you're a spy, ain't you?"

"You guessed it."

"Harkinson sent you?"

"No, we take turns; it was my turn. Nobody sends us. We know when it's our turn."

"Ain't that wonderful, Shadow?" I asked. "These Red Runners work like clockwork. What did you find out, Seventh-in-Line Lasky? What you goin' to tell when you get back? That is, if we let you get back?"

"Nothin'. I ain't seen or heard nothin'. My turn's up to-night. I ain't got nothin' to report."

Something told me the Seventh-in-Line was telling the truth, and wasn't afraid to tell it. I sort o' liked Lasky for that, even though he was a Red Runner.

"Well," I said, "the Sheriff of Watertown wants all you boys. Did you hear about that?"

"Yeah," Lasky nodded as he spoke; "we all know it. I kinda thought I might get caught by you fellas some day. But a fella has to take that chance, and I took it and lost."

I walked up to Seventh-in-Line Lasky and quickly opened my pocket-knife and cut the ropes that bound his hands.

"All right, Lasky," I said, "beat it. You haven't anything to report."

He smiled, surprised, as he looked up at me, and then around the faces behind the table. Then, without a word, he turned to the door. I motioned Perry Stokes to let him pass, and he stepped aside. The Red Runner leaped clear of the porch and sped down the path to the river, and I thought most likely maybe he had a skiff or something hidden down there.

The boys sat staring at me, as if I was the biggest fool they ever saw. Shadow Loomis was the only one who had a half smile on his face and seemed to understand what I was doing.

"Well, if you ain't a bonehead!" Jerry Moore blurted

out. "If I'd a known you was goin' to set him free, dern if I wouldn't have punched him a couple first. What's the use catchin' these Red Runners if you're gonna set 'em free right away?"

"Catch the Red Runners and I won't set a single one free, Jerry," I answered him. "Lasky is only seventh in line, you know. Say, Shadow, we left our canoes up in Cave River. If you're not afraid of Chinese magic we'd better go up and bring 'em back."

Which we did.

XVIII

A Hallowe'en Phantom

I DON'T think Seventh-in-Line Lasky ever told Harkinson or the other Red Runners that we had captured him. And I don't think he ever forgot that I turned him loose. I kind o' think he expected us to turn him over to the Sheriff. He knew the Sheriff was after the Red Runners. But I remember the last look Lasky gave me as he turned and flew out of our clubhouse. It was a kind of a thankful look. As if he wanted me to know that he understood that I had set him free, and got him out of a fix that he couldn't have hoped to escape from without my help.

But I didn't do it for anything like that. No. I figured it out quickly myself, and so did Shadow Loomis. Lasky was seventh in line. He didn't count for much in the Red Runners. And he hadn't found out anything to report during his spying upon our headquarters. What harm, then, would there be in turning him loose? What good would it have done to turn Lasky over to the Sheriff? No; if we had caught Harkinson, or Long Tom, or any of the others, why, I might have thought different. But Lasky; no, he wouldn't be much use to the Sheriff.

Jerry Moore did not quite forgive me for letting Lasky go. Jerry had caught him, and had made the first capture of a Red Runner. To Jerry, that meant a whole lot, for Jerry is kind o' stuck on his smartness, and what he can do. All the week afterward he was sore at me; he would hardly talk to me. Yet he knew that it wouldn't

have done any good to hold Lasky. I made him own up to that. But he stayed sulky, and kept away from me as much as he could.

But, now, Halloween-time was coming on, and the boys were busy, and the clubhouse was humming. Funny how a time like Halloween always makes the fellows hustle around more than other times. Perry Stokes would sneak away from the clubhouse each afternoon as soon as the meeting would be over. Each night when he returned he carried in a sack a fine pumpkin. Already there were five fine, big pumpkins lying on our clubhouse floor, waiting to be cut into jack-lanterns.

"Perry," I said, "where do you get these fine things?"

"Oh, the punkins?"

"Sure, you know what I mean well enough. Whose pumpkin patch have you been robbing, Perry? Do you know it ain't honest?"

"I didn't steal from no punkin patch, Hawkins. These grow wild down on the edge of the woods by Burneys' field."

"Wild? Wild pumpkins, Perry?"

"Yes, wild ones, sir. There's a lot of 'em right by Burney's—"

"Go on," I said, "you know these fine things don't grow wild. You've been stealing 'em."

I wouldn't talk to him any more about the pumpkins, but I could see that Perry was hurt by the way I scolded him.

Roy Dobel took Shadow Loomis and Robby Hood and me down to his pop's farm one afternoon, and said we could ride the horses that were in the pasture if we could catch them. I had a dickens of a time catching mine, but Shadow Loomis can do anything. He had his before any of us, and I caught mine last of all. We

had a pretty good ride then, and we must have gone five miles out on the road before we thought of turning back. The next day, when the other fellows heard of it, of course, they had to go horseback riding, too. I tell you, when all of the boys went along we looked like an army. And how we made the dust fly! Those were happy afternoons. We all got to know our own horses. Each fellow always picked out the same horse to ride. Shadow Loomis always gave his old brown horse something to eat. I think it was a lump of sugar. Anyway, every time he got off the old plug he would give it a handful of something. The third day after we began riding, Shadow's old horse would follow him around. Looking for something to eat, I guess. Shadow never had to catch his horse any more after that. As soon as we would come to the field the old plug that Shadow rode would come running to him, while all the rest of us would have to go running after ours and spend fifteen minutes chasing 'em before we could get on.

Well, the horseback riding was fine for a few days. And, during all this time, we did not have any trouble, either with the Pelhams or the Red Runners. It seemed as though our enemies had quit bothering us. But, of course, that was too good to be true.

Still, I always say that if it had not been for Perry's pumpkins, we wouldn't have got into trouble that day. I'll tell you how it was. We had all met at the clubhouse, and, after our meeting, we had gone riding again. I asked Robby Hood and Shadow Loomis to stay for supper at my house, which they did. After supper I said I was going down to the clubhouse to do some writing for a little while, and they could come down if they wanted to. But Shadow said he was going up to a place he knew in our town where they made false faces

and masquerade suits for Halloween. Robby said he would like to have one, too. So they both set off together, while I went down to the clubhouse.

Jerry was on watch there that night. He said "Hi" very shortly—he didn't talk much to me since I let Lasky go—and he sat on the step with the gun, while I unlocked the door and went in. I had been writing in my office about ten minutes when Jerry came in and said: "There's a man outside."

For a minute I was a little excited. I thought maybe he was going to say it was a Red Runner out there. But right after he said it in came a man whom I had never seen before.

"Beggin' your pardon," he said, "I don't like to intrude, but I came—you are Seckatary Hawkins, I take it?"

"That's what all the boys call me," I answered.

"Yes, yes. I knew it was you, sir, the moment I set my eyes upon you. You, perhaps, don't know me. I am the butler at Judge Granbery's—Perry's father, sir."

"Oh," I said, "Perry Stokes, yes, I know him. Glad to meet you, Mr. Stokes. I like your son very much. He sure is a fine boy."

"But he's not at home, sir," said Mr. Stokes; "it's strange, you know, him not home for his evening meal. His mother can't understand it at all, and we thought you might—"

"That's right," I said to myself, "Perry was not with us out riding this afternoon."

Then, to Perry's father, I said:

"Did he say where he was going when he left home to-day?"

"No, he never does any more. His mother thinks

he is always with you boys. Is it possible that he could have taken a boat and gone down the river?"

"Mr. Stokes," I said, "if you will go home and not worry I will get my boys busy at once and we will scout around. I'll let you hear from me if we can't find him."

So, after I had got rid of Perry's father, I called Jerry Moore in and told him what I had heard. Jerry grunted. "Huh! It's no wonder. Him stealing pumpkins every day—I knew it, Hawkins. One of those farmers got him and prob'ly had him locked up or something."

"You're right, Jerry," I said. "Would you care to take a trip down towards Burney's Field with me?"

"It's a purty lonesome place, Hawkins," said Jerry.

"Sure, but it won't be lonesome if you and I go together."

Just then came Robby and Shadow Loomis. Each carried a bundle in his arm.

"Wait till you see my Halloween suit, Hawkins," said Shadow.

"I haven't time for anything now, boys," I said. "Jerry and I have got to scout around and find Perry Stokes. He hasn't been home to his supper, and his maw's worried sick." Then I told them what we had heard. They wanted to come along, but I told them to stay in the clubhouse together and lock the door and wait till we came back.

Jerry and I were soon paddling in a canoe down the river, and a short distance down we crossed over to the Pelham side and pulled up our canoe and hid it behind the trees. Then we started lickety-split for Burney's Field. That's where Perry had said the pumpkins were growing wild. If he had gone for another pumpkin he had gone toward Burney's Field, and, if he had

gotten into trouble, it was most likely somewhere around Burney's Field that we should find him. And it was. But it was strange how we should find him at that. Stranger than you would imagine.

"What's that red in the sky?" asked Jerry, as we shoved through the woods.

"That's a fire somewhere," I said. "A bonfire, most likely, but not a big one, or it would be redder."

I took the lead and shoved on ahead. The woods thin out near the edge of Burney's Field. And we had come out suddenly into the red glow of the fire. Our footsteps had made enough noise. Yet, as we neared it through the woods, I thought I had heard talking and laughing. But there it was, only a big fire, blazing high.

"Somebody's been here, and not very long ago," said Jerry, "for there is fresh wood on that fire—see how it blazes."

I was about to say something about that myself when there came a loud yelling, and from the trees all around us sprang a dozen Red Runners. They jumped upon us like wild cats, and we were pinned to the ground. At once they stopped their yelling. Not another sound they made. Harkinson was not there. I looked eagerly into every face to see if the old hypnotizer or Long Tom was among them. But both the leaders were absent. The one who gave orders, while the rest tied us up, was a greasy, dark-haired, hook-nosed fellow, whom I imagined was Androfski, the fellow Shadow Loomis told us about. In a few minutes, less than it takes to tell, they had us tied to trees about four feet apart. When we were tied tight they seemed to forget all about us and walked back to the fire and sat down, talking in low whispers. I counted them. There was an even dozen.

"Fine boobs we are to walk into this trap," muttered

Jerry to me. I didn't feel like talking. "Look there," whispered Jerry. I followed his pointing and saw, tied to another tree, Perry Stokes, his head bowed upon his breast, sound asleep. If he had not been tied so fast to that tree he would have fallen down in a heap, but I don't think he would have awakened. Anybody who can sleep like that won't wake up very easily.

"We've got to get loose, Jerry," I whispered. "How are your hands?"

"Tight," said Jerry in a low tone. "No use. Can't even move my foot."

"Listen."

Across Burney's Field came a sound—the sound of hoofbeats. The Red Runners had heard it, too. I wondered if they were waiting for Harkinson or Long Tom to come and decide what they were going to do with us. But the hoofbeats died away. It was only some one passing on the river road, I thought. Another ten minutes we stood. I tried to listen to what the Red Runners were talking about, but they spoke in such low voices that I could not catch a single word.

"There it comes again."

The sound of a horse galloping toward us. It sounded near this time. We could make out a dim shadow now, and it was on the other side of us, riding away from us, across Burney's Field. Slowly the sound of those galloping hoofs died out again. "Dern it," said Jerry Moore, "what's their game, anyhow? I'm going to get out of this if I have to break down this tree."

Then came a yell. It was the worst, blood-curdling yell I ever heard. It came from the other end of Burney's Field, and it rolled down to us like the cry of a wolf. I saw some of the Red Runners get up from their places around the fire and stare into the dark across the blaze

"FINE BOOBS WE ARE TO WALK INTO THIS TRAP," MUTTERED JERRY.

of their fire. Then came the sound of hoofs again, coming toward us, faster and faster. All the Red Runners jumped up now. The hoofbeats were sounding in the middle of the field. Several Red Runners sprang forward and then jumped back again. Quickly they whispered together for a few moments. It was easy to see that they were as much puzzled as we were. And then—

And then—with another frightful howl that sent the chills up my back there came into the outer edge of light a frightful figure—what could you make of a shape that was no shape—yet it sounded like a horse galloping—yet looked like nothing that was ever seen before. The Red Runners yelled in fright, sprang for the woods behind us, and fled away. I looked just once and closed my eyes as I saw that on-coming shape leap through the fire and scatter the burning wood in a million sparks in every direction. For the one look that I had at that ugly, ghostly thing had nearly scared me to death. It was a yellow thing—an ugly headed thing, upon which sat a wolf-faced rider, the ugliest sight I ever saw. I say I closed my eyes when I took the first look.

But I opened them quickly when I heard Shadow Loomis yelling in my ear.

"What's a matter, Hawkins? Look here. How do you like this Halloween suit? It's some masquerade, isn't it?"

. . . . . .

You bet I opened my eyes then. I saw Shadow standing in front of me, dressed in a yellow gown, holding in his hands an ugly painted, pasteboard mask that looked like a big wolf's head, and beside him was his old pet horse, wearing a long yellow covering from his head

to his tail, with two big eye holes, and long fringes on either side that waved in the wind like a hundred tails. Shadow hurried to cut the ropes that tied Jerry and me.

"Well, of all things," I said. "You nearly scared me and Jerry to death, Shadow."

"I had to," said Shadow, with a laugh. "I saved you from the Red Runners—I just happened to think about it after you boys left. I saw Androfski to-day—followed him down all the way from Watertown. Saw the red sky and figured it was his camp—he always makes a bonfire where he camps—so I just slipped into this old wolf masquerade that I got for Halloween. See that funny one on my horse? That's Robby Hood's. I borrowed it, snuck down and got my horse out o' Dobel's pasture—easy enough to catch him soon as I holler. Then I dressed him up and rode to Hobb's Ferry and came over and started for the light. I thought I'd give the Red Runners a good scare while I was at it—"

"You sure gave it to 'em," I broke in.

"I'll say he did," called somebody across from us. It was Perry Stokes. We had forgotten about him tied to a tree fast asleep. The racket had wakened him. We all three hurried over and got him loose, but he didn't seem any the worse for his long tie-up. He told us the Red Runners had spied him just as he was making for home, and had taken him prisoner.

"Well," I said, "we'd better get along home as fast as we can. Your maw is worried sick about you not coming home."

"All right," said Perry, "Wait till I get my punkin." He ran back into the trees and came out with a sack, in which he had another pumpkin.

"Can you beat that?" said Jerry Moore to me. "He sure is crazy about punkins."

"Fellas," I said, "if you all got time, I think we better go together and explain how it was that Perry couldn't get home in time for supper to-night."

Which we did.

XIX

The Face in the Dark

I TOOK a roundabout way to the clubhouse as I came down after school. I just wanted to see how things looked up the river a little ways, so I went up the main road and then cut down to the river, and came back up along the water. As I neared our wharf I noticed Robby Hood's boat tied up, and I hurried, because I knew either Robby or Shadow was already at the clubhouse. When I came up I saw both of 'em sitting on the porch steps.

I was just about to step onto the path when I saw a movement in the bushes. At once I thought it was a Red Runner. But when the fellow lifted his head and peeped over the bushes I saw that it was Briggen, the Pelham leader. He took only one short look at the two boys on the clubhouse steps. Then his head bobbed back down in the bushes, and I heard him scrambling away.

"Hi, fellas," I said, "you are sure on time to-day."

"Easy when the Red Runners ain't around," said Shadow. "I haven't seen Harkinson for a week. The rest of 'em are keeping to themselves since I gave them that scare on Burney's field."

The boys arrived soon and we held our meeting and paid our dues. But all the while I was thinking of Briggen hiding in the bushes and wondered why the Pelham leader had been spying on our side.

Bill Darby had brought down a new football, and as soon as the meeting was over they all rushed down to the

hollow to play, except Shadow and Robby and Dick Ferris and me.

We walked out to the porch and saw Jerry Moore building his campfire on the river bank.

"Same old Jerry," said Robby Hood. "Wherever you see him standing you'll see a fire burning in a short time."

We all walked down and sat around Jerry's fire—or smoke, rather, for he seemed to be having a hard time getting it started.

"Hello, old Hippopotamus," said Shadow, grinning at Jerry. Shadow always liked to call the boys nick-names.

"Hello, old Fox," answered Jerry. (Jerry was kind o' quick about giving names himself.) "How comes the hounds ain't chasin' you to-day, old Fox?"

"Hain't seen no hounds to-day yet," laughed Shadow in a comical voice; "but looky yonder—what kind o' water babies you call those comin' to pay us a visit?"

We all looked toward the river and saw a boat pulling toward us from the Pelham shore. Three Pelham fellows were in it. Briggen, the leader, sat in the stern, while Ham Gardner and Dave Burns pulled hard at the oars, and it took them little or no time to reach our bank. We walked slowly to meet them. They had already leaped out, and Briggen was leading the way to us.

"What's the trouble, Briggen?" asked our Captain, Dick Ferris. He and Briggen had been good friends in the days gone by, before Dick came back to our side of the river.

"I ain't got nothin' agin you fellas, Dick," said Briggen, "and Hawkins and the rest. I ain't forgot how you guys helped us get clear of Harkinson last summer. But this yere new guy you got with you, it's him I got to talk to, and all I ask is that you don't butt in."

"You want to talk to me?" asked Shadow, stepping up. "My name's Shadow Loomis. I've heard lots about you Pelham fellas, but this is the first time I had the honor to meet you, I think."

"Never mind the fancy talk," grumbled Briggen. "How come you have such a nutty name as Shadow? You don't look like no shadow to me. You been talking about liking to meet us Pelham fellas, ain't you? Yes, you did. Don't say you didn't, cause I had my boys spying around yere all the time. One of my fellas told me you said you would like to meet us birds; said you would make us like our side of the river better than this side, didn't you?"

"Something like that," answered Shadow, smiling. "But only if you tried to butt in. As long as you stay where you belong and behave yourself, why, I won't take the trouble of looking you up."

Briggen snorted, angry and red in the face.

"Well, let me tell you, smart boy," he cried, "we like our side of the river well enough without any fellas has to make us like it. And whenever we want to we come over here, or we go anywheres else. Ain't nobody told us yet that these fellas owned this side of the river. See?"

"Cut it out, Briggen," broke in Dick Ferris; "I thought you fellas were going to be good."

"Wait a minute," said Shadow slowly. "Lemme get a good look at you, Pelham boy—where'd I see that face before? Wonder if it could have been in the monkey cage of that circus that came here last spring? You didn't break out o' that, did you?"

This teasing was too much for Briggen. He made a little motion with one hand, and his two side partners moved back to the boat. Briggen stepped up closer to Shadow Loomis.

"You're a mighty flip talker," he said; "but if you wasn't standing in the middle of your pals, I'd punch that pug nose of yours flat with your face, see?"

"Try it," said Shadow Loomis.

Briggen raised his fist, but Shadow quickly lifted one foot and caught the Pelham leader behind his boot and sat him down on the ground with a thump. Briggen closed his eyes and gritted his teeth as he landed. We had to laugh, and when he saw us laughing he grew furious. He got up, rubbing his pants, and backed away.

"All right," he whined. "All right, you got it coming to you; just wait."

Shadow had a smile on his good-looking face as he watched Briggen walk down to the boat, but he did not say another word to the Pelham leader.

"Come on, fellas," said our Captain. "Let 'em go."

Shadow gave a little laugh and we turned and started to walk up the bank. I just happened to turn my head a little and saw Briggen running up behind Shadow.

"Look out!" I yelled.

Bam! Briggen's fist caught Shadow right in the back of the neck, and he stumbled forward. As we sprang to help him to his feet, Briggen dashed back to his boat.

"Doggone," muttered Shadow, "that's the way they fight, is it?"

It was no use to follow. The Pelham boat had pushed off, and was already out in the deep water. Briggen was standing in the middle of the boat shaking his fist at us. "And next time I'll give you worse than that," he yelled.

"Like fun you will," shouted Shadow with a grin. "Try it!"

We walked back and sat down around Jerry's campfire. For a while no one spoke. Then Jerry said:

"Say, Shadow, you're not going to let him get away with that, are you?"

Shadow seemed to be dreaming as he gazed into the fire.

"Who, Briggen?" he asked. Then he looked at the fire awhile, and said, slowly, "No, I kind o' think Briggen will get paid back some way. I always take my time."

Just then Robby Hood came up with the other boys who had ended their football playing.

"Robby, please get my suitcase out o' your launch, will you, buddy?" asked Shadow.

Robby would do anything for Shadow Loomis. He came back in a little while with the little brown suitcase. Seemed like Shadow never went anywhere without that suitcase. He carried all his magic tricks in it. And when I saw Robby bring it up I knew right away that Briggen was going to get paid back some way. Shadow took a little square box from his suitcase and said:

"Will you show me Briggen's headquarters to-night, Hawkins?"

"Sure," I answered. "But it's near supper-time, and we better be getting home. You and Robby come up to my house. My maw will be glad to see you. And she baked some apple pies—"

"Oh, boy!" said Robby Hood. "Listen to those apple pies. Come on, Shadow, you won't be sorry you went after you taste that pie Hawkins's mother makes."

Shadow seemed as though he did not want to go, but when he heard about apple pie—. Aw, well, I never saw a boy yet who didn't like apple pie.

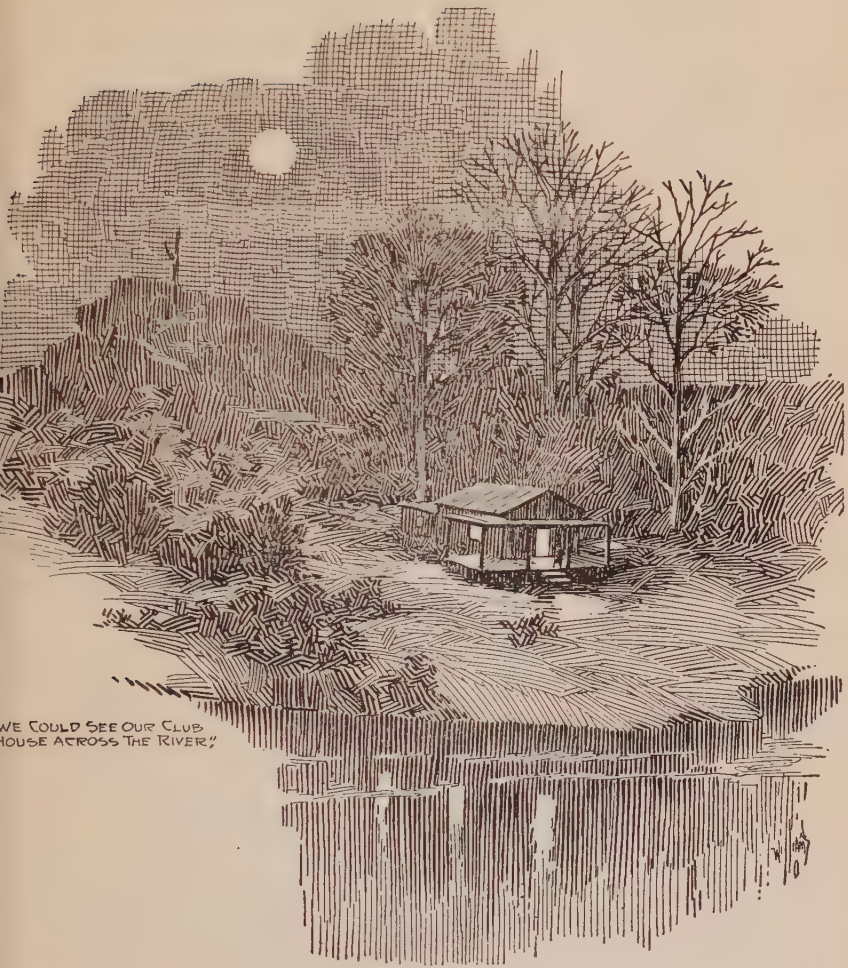
. . . . . .

Lew Hunter and Dick Ferris were the first ones down after supper. We heard the organ playing and Dick singing. Shadow made us stop outside and listen till the song ended. "Gosh, how that Ferris boy can warble!" he said. Then we went in. We explained to Lew that we wanted him to stay there and keep all the other boys inside the clubhouse when they came. Then we went out, Dick and Shadow and Robby and me, and took Jerry Moore's long, green canoe and started down the river. When we had gone a little ways we turned sharp for the Pelham bank and went across. Reaching the Pelham bank, we pulled the canoe up and began to trot for the Pelham shacks. As we neared the place we could see our clubhouse across the river, and what a pretty sight it was from this distance, all lighted up, and the door opening up every once in a while, which meant that some of the other fellows were arriving and going in.

"This is Briggen's headquarters," said Dick Ferris, stopping in front of the Pelham leader's shack. "It's not locked, Shadow."

Shadow pushed in the door and we followed. The ray of light from Shadow's flashlight sketched over the walls. "All right, Robby," he said, "you stand outside and watch if anybody comes. Dick, will you stand in back of the shack and watch? Hawkins, you hold this light for me."

Dick and Robby followed orders. I took the light and held it while Shadow drew quickly from his pocket the little box I had seen him take from his suitcase. Quickly he worked upon the rear wall of the shack, as though he was drawing a picture. Although he made motions I couldn't see that he left any chalk marks. I held the light right close.



WE COULD SEE OUR CLUB
HOUSE ACROSS THE RIVER."

"Hurry!" came Robby's voice from the front. "I hear them coming."

"Out with the light, Hawkins," whispered Shadow. I slipped my finger off the button and we were in the dark—Golly, Moses! What was the thing with hollow eyes and grinning teeth looking at us from the wall? It shocked me for a minute, but then I laughed low to myself as I realized that Shadow had put it there. But if I had not seen Shadow do it, and had come upon that thing alone in the dark, I sure would have turned quick and beat it. It was only marked like a drawing on the wall. I know that. I don't know what kind of stuff it was, or what, but it shivered and glowed like a dull light, and there seemed to be a greenish smoke coming away from it. Of all the spooky things I ever saw this face upon the wall was the limit.

We heard Robby scampering behind the shack to join Dick. But we were too late to get out, for we could hear Briggen and Ham Gardner talking right outside the door. The door was standing open wide, and we hid behind it, Shadow and I, and peeped through the crack. Briggen and Ham were standing there, looking across the river. The faint sound of Lew's organ playing came over the water to us.

"Looks like Hawkins' bunch is having a big time to-night, Ham," said Briggen. "Maybe we could sneak over and get another smack at that flip Shadda fella."

"No," said Ham, "don't go back over to-night, Briggen. You forgot to lock your door to-night. Look thar', wide open."

"Oh, it won't make no difference, nobody would steal anything I got," said Briggen, as he came nearer. We saw him stop suddenly at the doorstep. Then he poked

his head into the dark door. The next minute he let out a yell.

"Oh, Lordy, Ham, look!" he whispered, and as Ham drew up behind his shoulder, Briggen stumbled backward with fright.

"Spooks," he cried in a hoarse voice. "Spooks, Ham, as sure as you live—"

Like a flash Briggen was off up the path that led through the woods. Ham Gardner stayed long enough to take one look at the ugly shivering face that smoked in its green light upon the wall, and then he, too, turned, and as silent as a shadow, followed the path Briggen had taken.

Shadow Loomis was laughing fit to kill. "Oh, boy!" he cried. "Did you see his face, Hawkins? He was scared to death. Ho, ho, haha—"

"What's up?" came Dick's voice, as he and Robby came to the door with their flashlights. But, strange to say, when the lights were turned on, there was no sign of that face on the wall.

"Put out your light, Robby," I said. And, then, when we were in the dark again they saw that ugly mug that had frightened the Pelham leader and Ham.

"I never saw him scared like that before," said Dick, laughing. "How did you make that, Shadow?"

But Shadow did not answer. He had taken a rag from his pocket and was rubbing it over the wall where the face had been, and I could smell that he had benzine or gasoline on that rag.

"There!" he said, "it won't bother 'em any more. Come on. I'm ready to go."

"Say, Shadow," I said, "you mean to say you ain't goin' to give Briggen a licking?"

"I had my revenge," he said. "You don't always

have to beat a kid to get even, Hawkins. Just to see him scared like that, and to know I scared him, is even enough for me."

We were trotting down to our canoe, and I thought to myself, I never saw a fellow like Shadow before. We had to laugh every time we thought about how scared Briggen was when he looked into his headquarters. We hurried into the canoe and paddled across. As we stepped out on our shore from far away down the river came the faint sound of a horn.

"Aha!" exclaimed Shadow, "we got back just in time. Harkinson—down on Seven Willows Island. Robby, we will have time to get home ahead of them if we hurry."

The boys were standing on the clubhouse porch waiting for us. They all went down to the water with us and Shadow and Robby started up the river for home. When we saw the tail-light of their little motor boat disappear around the upper bend we started back to the clubhouse.

"Listen!" Dick Ferris spoke. A little louder this time came the brassy notes of the horn. "Harkinson coming this way," said our Captain. "It's good Shadow and Robby got this early start. And we better put those lights out and hurry home before they come past here."

Which we did.

XX

The Pelhams in Trouble

LEW HUNTER was cleaning out the old stove in the clubhouse when I came down after school. We had not used the old stove so far this year, and sometimes the clubhouse was a pretty cold place to stay. Most always the fellows would rush out just as soon as our meeting was over and go down to the campfire that Jerry Moore always had burning on the river bank as soon as school was out.

"Listen, Hawkins," said Lew, "you've got to make those kids stay here for singing practice when I tell 'em to. Every day they laugh at me and tell me to sing to myself."

"You do sound very fine singin' by yourself, Lew," I said.

"Don't kid me," said Lew. "Listen, they always say it's too cold to stay in here. Now, I'm goin' to have a fire in this old stove or bust 'er, one or the other. If we ain't got enough money in the treasury box to buy a new one this one's got to do. And, if it works, why, you got to make the fellas stay in to singing practice."

"All right, Lew," I said, "if the others won't stay, you can count on me to stay, anyhow."

Dick Ferris came in.

"Dick," I said, "you better give a few orders for the fellas to gather some firewood. We've got to keep the stove going, you know."

"Sure," said Dick, "it's time the stove was kept going."

So at the meeting Dick got up and made a rule that everybody had to bring seven pieces of firewood in every day. Why he said seven I don't know; but I guess he's got it figured out pretty close. All the boys understood that it was a rule that the Captain made, and nobody made any objection. Right after the meeting they scouted around, and it wasn't very long till each boy had brought in his seven pieces of wood, and a nice pile was stacked up behind the stove. And the old stove was going nicely, and the clubhouse as warm as a fellow could wish.

Robby Hood and Shadow Loomis had not come to the meeting. The other boys, after the meeting was over, went to the hollow with Bill Darby's football. Lew Hunter and Dick were looking over some new music sheets Lew had bought, and I walked back into my little office and began to write the minutes of the meeting. I didn't like to go out, it felt so warm and nice inside. I hummed along as Lew played the old organ, and Dick sang some of the new pieces, and it seemed to me that there couldn't be a nicer place than this old clubhouse shack in the hollow.

The music and singing stopped after a while, and I heard Lew and Dick go out. I kept on humming to myself as I wrote, and then I stopped and looked out of the window, watching the boys scrambling for the football in the hollow. I heard the clubhouse door open, but I thought it was Dick or Lew coming back for something. I was just about to call and ask who it was when all of a sudden the curtains parted in my door and the Pelham leader stood there.

"Briggen," I said, "what do you mean by walking in here just as you please? Don't you know you ain't allowed—"

"I had to come," broke in Briggen. "I just had to come, Hawkins. Harkinson and his gang won't let us rest. They been hanging around in the woods back o' our shacks all week. Wherever we go we run into a Red Runner."

I had to smile at the Pelham leader as I listened to him say that.

"Briggen," I said, "you must be a fool to play such a dirty trick on our Shadow Loomis last week, and then turn right around and come over here and ask up to help you."

"Don't preach, Hawkins," said Briggen, with a sour look on his face. "Don't preach to me any more. You know us fellas didn't have no bone to pick with you fellas; it was only that Shadda fella; him that was saying things about us."

"Listen," I said, pointing my finger at Briggen, "Shadow Loomis is my friend, and he belongs to our club. Whenever you play tricks on him you get in Dutch with all of us, see?"

Briggen bit his lip and, for a minute, he didn't answer. Then he said:

"I wisht we would'a known that sooner, Hawkins. Cross my heart, I would'a let him alone if we'd'a' known that, even if he did act smart with us. But we won't bother him no more. Only save poor Ham Gardner from Harkinson, and us fellas won't bother you guys no more."

"Ham?" I repeated. "What has Ham done to Harkinson that he should—"

"Ham ain't done nothin. It's what Harkinson's done to Ham. Poor kid, he ain't hisself no more. Ever since last summer, when Harkinson was bossin' us boys on the island up there, Ham ain't hisself. He's afraid

o' his own shadda, Hawkins. He peeks in everything he passes, thinkin' maybe Harkinson or one o' his redcoats is laying for him. And one night last week they had—"

Briggen stopped and looked back through the curtains. His face had a scared look.

"Hawkins," he said, "them Red Runners are queer. They can make you see ghosts. I don't know if all of 'em can, but Harkinson is a hypnotizer. He made me see a spook right in my own shack."

His voice was a whisper as he leaned over the desk and told me this awful thing. I looked in his eyes and saw that he was really in earnest. But then I laughed out loud.

"Go on," I said. "Don't let him kid you like that, Briggen."

"You don't have to believe me," said Briggen, "ask Ham. He saw it, too. I never saw a ghost before, but I know what they look like now. This sure was one, Hawkins. Ham ain't been hisself since. And every time he hears that horn he thinks he has to get right up and go. He thinks Harkinson is calling for him, and he must go and do as he says. Now, tell me, Hawkins, is that a way for a kid to be ascared of a fella?"

I did not answer Briggen right away. I sat there and looked at him, while my mind was busy thinking. It was a cinch that neither Briggen nor Ham Gardner ever found out that it was Shadow Loomis who fixed up that face in the dark that looked out at them when they entered Briggen's shack that night. They figured out that it was Harkinson alone who could do such a thing, and they really believed that it was a ghost. Most any boy is afraid of anything that looks like a ghost, especially when it is such a thing as a glowing face in the dark.

But the Pelhams are more likely to believe in such things than other fellas.

Just as I was about to say something to Briggen, Perry Stokes came quickly in the door. He glanced once at Briggen, then he turned to me and said:

"Dick sent me up to tell you that the Red Runners are here. Him and Lew Hunter saw three fellas in the woods behind the cliffs."

"All right, Perry," I said, "tell Lew I'm coming right down."

Perry hurried out. Briggen came over and grabbed my sleeve.

"They've come after us, Hawkins," he said. "They won't bother you guys. I better be going."

For one moment I looked out the window. Then I stood up and held Briggen's arm.

"Wait," I said.

For I had let my thoughts run back to a day last summer at our camp on the island. It was a day when Ham Gardner had done us a good turn—gave us a tip that Harkinson and his pals were going up the river to trap two of our boys who had gone to town for groceries. It was Ham who had saved those two boys from Harkinson's whip.

"Go on back, Briggen," I said. "Go back and tell Ham that we never forget when a fella does us a good turn or a bad one. He will know what I mean."

Briggen left without another word. I hurried into my jacket and cap and ran for the hollow. The boys had all quit playing football. They stood in a little bunch over by the trees. Dick came to meet me as I came up.

"We might catch a couple of redcoats, Hawkins,"

he said. "They've been spying on us from trees behind the cliffs over there."

The football was hidden safely in a spot that Bill picked out, and we trotted away up the path. We reached the top of the bluff and stopped for breath. Dick pointed to the river. A long, thin motor boat was being paddled across. In it sat three Red Runners, each wearing the red sweater which gave their gang its name.

"Back!" ordered Dick. "Every one come back."

Back we started. When we reached the clubhouse path, I said:

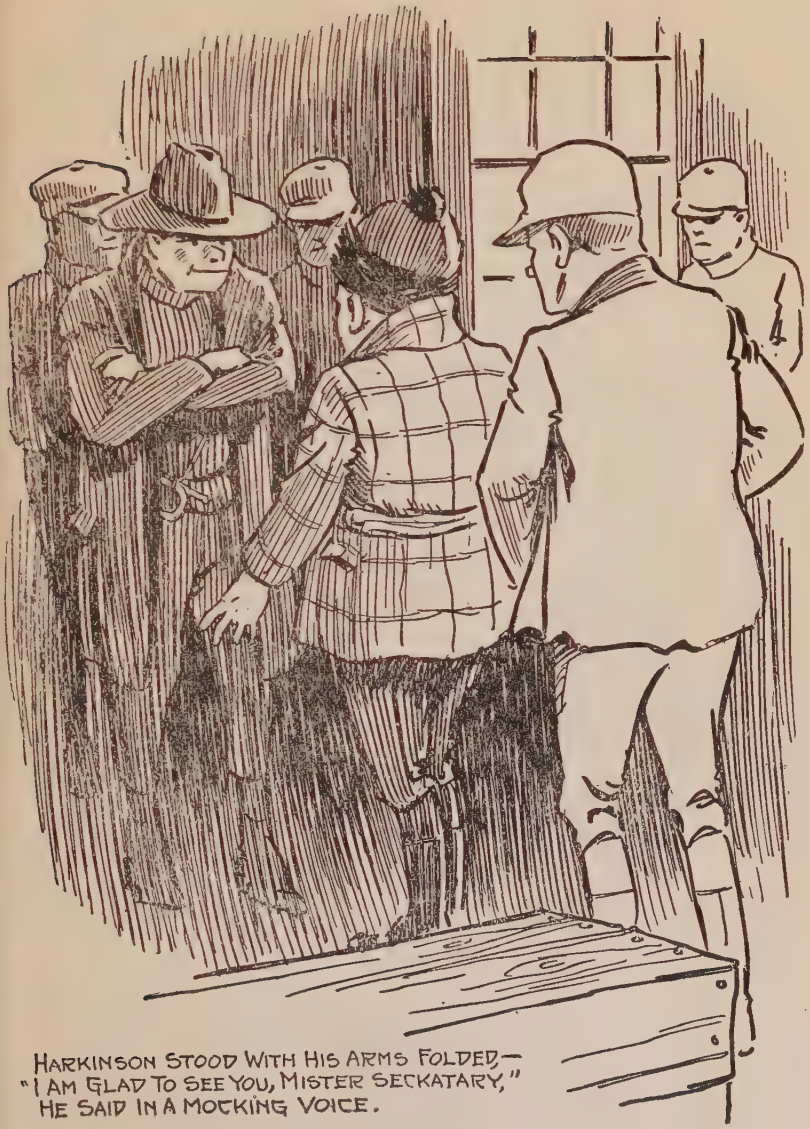
"Dick, get the boys up in the clubhouse as soon as you can and stay there. Jerry Moore will go with me across the river. You fellows all go up and hold a singing practice. And keep on singing till we come back. Will you do it?"

Sure, Dick would do it, and away they went, while Jerry shoved off his long canoe, and we paddled across to Pelham. There was not a soul in sight when we landed.

"Come on, Jerry," I said, and I headed for Briggen's shack. And there—

Harkinson stood with his arms folded in the middle of the room smiling at me. But it was no friendly smile, I can tell you that.

"You came," he said. And then he laughed. I did not answer. I stood there in the doorway, with Jerry Moore right in back of me. In the dark shadows at the back wall of the Pelham leader's shack were the three Red Runners we had seen going across in the boat. There was hardly any light in the shack, but you don't need any light to see those shining eyes of Harkinson. His low laugh got on my nerves. I tried to talk, but



HARKINSON STOOD WITH HIS ARMS FOLDED—
"I AM GLAD TO SEE YOU, MISTER SECKATARY,"
HE SAID IN A MOCKING VOICE.

somehow, maybe I was scared, I don't know—but somehow I couldn't take my eyes away from his.

"I am glad to see you, Mister Seckatary," he said, in a mocking voice. "I thought maybe I could get you over here by sending some of my boys across. I knew you would follow them. I didn't make much of a mistake about that. Sit down."

He just said that in a commanding tone, and it made me mad. I tried to say No, but I just couldn't. Jerry already had taken one of the low stools. I found myself doing the same thing.

"Now," said Harkinson, "talk."

"You won't get away from here," I said. "The Sheriff of Watertown wants you and all your redcoats. And I have my boys ready to get you just as soon as you leave this shack."

Harkinson smiled. "You don't always tell the truth," he said, "because I know different. Your boys all went up into the clubhouse. We saw them through the blind—you see, there is a nice peephole there. And before you could get them down here, why, I'd be on my way so far you slow pokes could never catch up with me. Anything else you want to say before you get your punch in the eye." Before I could answer Jerry Moore jumped up.

"I got one thing to say, Harkinson," he said, "and that is that you are not big enough to punch me or any of us boys in the eye. What do you think about that?"

Harkinson turned suddenly upon Jerry.

"Oho," he laughed, "listen to Clumsyfoot, here. How he can blow. Well, here."

Without giving Jerry a chance the big bully punched him square in the eye. Jerry tumbled off his stool

before he could raise his arms to help himself. I quickly turned my eyes away and helped Jerry to his feet.

"You're a coward," I cried. "Why don't you fight fair? Maybe you don't know what that is."

"All right, boys," said Harkinson to the three Red Runners who stood against the wall, "keep those two here till dark. Long Tom will come with the boat and take them up to our headquarters. See how they like our place. What's that?"

Across the river had come the strains of "The Boatman's Song"—our boys were starting their singing practice. And how fine it sounded—all those boy voices in harmony, with the swelling tones of the organ—ah, boy! Harkinson shoved us aside and walked out the door and stood there looking at our clubhouse from where the singing came. He had a different look on his face while he listened to the singing.

It gave Jerry the chance. He leaped through the door and landed on the shoulders of the big bully, and I saw them go down in the dust together. Quick as a wink I darted through the door and pulled it shut, just as the three Red Runners sprang for me. A chain latch hung on the outside, and I linked it on the staple and slipped the bolt in quick. The three fellows inside began pounding on the door, but I turned and ran to help Jerry.

I saw them halfway down the bank, rolling over and over toward the water.

"Jerry," I yelled, "let him go, do you want to get drowned?"

Then I saw Harkinson leap up, free, and, with a last kick at Jerry, he turned for the upper bank, and ran like a deer. I hurried to help Jerry, and got him on his feet.

'Good Lord, Hawkins," he whispered, "that fella's a bear—he nearly squeezed me to death—where'd he go?"

"There," I said, pointing, but Harkinson had disappeared in the woods away from the water.

"What's happened, Hawkins?" called some one, and we turned and saw Briggen and Ham Gardner and Dave Burns running down the Pelham bank.

"Plenty," I answered; "it's a good thing you fellas weren't around. They were in your shack, Briggen. Harkinson and three Red Runners."

Briggen frowned, and I saw Ham Gardner turn pale. "Is he gone?" asked Briggen in a whisper.

"Yes," I said; but three of his redcoats are in there—prisoners. I latched your door—"

Clear came the call from the woods on the upper bank—the sound of the brass horn—Harkinson calling for his Red Runners.

"Ha-ha!" I laughed. "He wants his three pals to come, but I guess they won't answer the call of the old horn this time, Jerry, what?"

But then something happened that I never will forget. No, sir! I never saw any boys do it before, and never will see it again. Only Red Runners would be game enough to try such a thing. There came the crash of breaking glass, and a chair was shoved through the window of Briggen's shack. Before we knew what was happening, the whole window fell out in pieces, and we saw three silent, red-coated figures leap through that opening like cats. We were too surprised to move, and, by the time Briggen shouted "Stop 'em, fellas!" they had sped past us like the wind and headed for the woods. The sound of the horn rang out again, and it seemed

to make them hurry. Some of the Pelhams started after them, but they saw it was too late, and they gave it up.

"Good-night!" I said, "they sure do get up and go when they hear that horn, Jerry. Who would have thought—"

"There goes Ham!" yelled Briggen. "Hold him, fellas! Hold him."

But Ham was gone. In to the woods he ran, and was gone before any of the Pelham boys could get to him. All of them, led by Briggen, shot away in to the woods after him.

"Poor kid," I said, "the old hypnotizer's got him scared silly, Jerry. He gets so excited when he hears that horn he thinks he has to run to it. I hope Harkinson won't be waiting."

"They're big enough to take care of themselves," grumbled Jerry.

I turned and looked at him and I had to smile. He was looking at me out of only one eye; the other one, which Harkinson had punched was blue and swollen, and half closed.

"Jerry," I said, "do you think we should follow the Pelhams and see if they catch Ham?"

"Ham, nothin'," growled Jerry. "It's raw beef we want, Hawkins, to put on my eye. Let's go up to the butcher shop and get a piece right away."

Which we did.

XXI

The Canary

"I'VE got an idea," said Bill Darby.

"Hooray!" shouted Jerry Moore. "It's the first one you ever had, Bill."

We had been talking about getting off from school for a day to go and gather beech nuts.

"Let's hear what Bill has to say," said our Captain, hitting the table with his wooden hammer. "And you, Jerry, keep your mouth shut till somebody asks you something."

If it had been anybody else but our Captain saying that Jerry would have been up on his feet ready to fight. But he knows we all have to do what the Captain says, and so he stayed quiet.

"Here it is," said Bill, "and it's a pippin'. You all know our teacher's got a birthday this week. He ought to let us have a holiday on account of that, but will he? Not much. He ain't gonna advertise it that way. He won't say a word about it being his birthday."

"Of course not," said Johnny McLarren, "he doesn't care who knows what day his birthday is."

"No," said Bill, "he won't say a word about it to anybody."

"Well," I said, "seems to me, Bill, that if he doesn't say anything about it we are likely to go to school on that day the same as other days."

"Yeah," said Bill, "but that ain't my idea. You fellas ain't give me time to tell you what I had on my mind."

"Well, go ahead, and say it out loud," broke in Jerry Moore; "you're talkin' a whole lot without sayin' much."

"Just this," said Bill. "If he won't tell us it's his birthday, we'll tell him. We will all chip in a dime or two and buy him a present. Then, when the day comes, hand him the present, and if he's a fine fella, he'll say: 'Boys, take a holiday on me.' "

"Sounds all right," said Jerry, "if it will work."

Sure it would work. All the boys thought so as soon as they heard Bill suggest it. Our Captain told us it would work, and so he gave orders for each boy to chip in and make a sum of money to buy a present with.

The next thing to do was to figure out what would be the best thing to give him for a present. Every fellow in the clubhouse thought of something different, but it was Bill Darby who had the right thing in mind. In fact, I think Bill must have been thinking of this for a long time.

"A bird," he said; "a nice yella canary bird in a fancy cage. It'll cost a little more than something you fellas thought of, but what's the diff? He likes birds."

"Aw, forget it," said Jerry Moore. "Why, he's got four canary birds now in his house."

"Sure," said Bill, "that's a sign he likes 'em better'n anything else."

"Bill's about right," said our Captain; "a canary would just about do."

And so it was that we started out to buy a canary bird. We all had to chip in fifteen cents more, but what's fifteen cents when you buy a fellow a birthday present? Nothing. So out we went to old Hiram's place and looked over the birds he had. He raises rabbits and pigeons and squirrels and dogs and everything. He had

some fine birds there for a fancy price, but we couldn't pay so high. So I told old Hiram what we wanted to do with the bird and he kind o' likes us boys, and he chuckled and patted me on the back, and said: "If that's it, I give you something nice, bird and cage; how's that?"

"Fine," I said; "let's see it."

He took us over to a corner where there hung a little wire bird cage with a bird in it. It was only a part yellow bird: had some black on its beak, and the tips of the wings are black. But Hiram said it would sing some day, anyhow. So we took it and gave Hiram all the money we had collected for it. He didn't even count it; shoved it in his pocket without looking at it. That shows that he was treating us good, anyhow.

Now, it was two days yet until the teacher's birthday. So we took the bird and cage back to the clubhouse and decided it was best to leave it there. Perry Stokes was appointed keeper of the bird until the day he would present it to the teacher. He was to feed it and see that it didn't get hurt. We ought to have known better than to let Perry have that job. But it's too late to talk about that now.

All this week we had been very peaceful; Pelham had not started anything, and had stayed over on the other side of the river. As for the Red Runners, it must have been that Shadow Loomis and Robby Hood were keeping them busy up in Watertown, for we didn't have a visit from Shadow or Robby, and for many days we had not seen any of Harkinson's band of redcoats—had not even heard the sound of the hypnotizer's horn around our river bank.

"Too good to last long," said Jerry Moore to me; "something's coming off pretty soon, remember those

words, Hawkins. Long Tom and his pals are hatching something."

I felt that way myself, but I didn't think it would do any good to tell the fellows. So I said to Dick Ferris:

"May be it would be better not to keep the bird in the clubhouse. Suppose the Red Runners take a notion to break in some night—"

But Dick shook his head and the canary stayed in the clubhouse, on top of the cupboard, and was not bothered at all. Perry Stokes got to love that bird, I think. He is a kind-hearted kid. Takes a fancy to animals and birds. We had to yell at him a couple of times to stop pouring birdseed into the cage. Why, if that yellow bird ate all the food Perry Stokes shoved into that cage, it would have been as big as an eagle by this time. But Perry said it was better than not putting enough in, and we couldn't say he was wrong about that.

Now, the day before the birthday, I came down to the clubhouse right after school. I thought I'd be the first one there, but I saw the door open, and so I walked up easy and peeped in. Perry Stokes was there ahead of me. He was feeding the bird—pouring a cupful of birdseed into the cage. I stood and watched him. He put down the cup and, stooping down with his hands on his knees, began to talk to the bird.

"Poor li'l' fella," he said; "poor li'l' dickybird, what'd you ever do to get put in jail like that for, huh?"

"Hello, Perry," I said. "Always on the job, aren't you, kid?"

"Oh, Hawkins," he said, turning quickly, "you scared me, sir. Thought I was all alone here—just me and the bird, sir."

"How many times must I tell you to cut out that 'sir' when you talk to me, Perry?"

He grinned at me.

"Oh, I forget, Hawkins," he said; "but it will stop, sir, I promise you that."

"You've been very kind to that bird, Perry."

"Yes, sir; I think he likes me. I've grown to like him, too. I'm sorry he won't be here after to-night, sir. The birthday is to-morrow. He will go up to the teacher's house then, and hang in his little cage for the rest of his life. And it's a gloomy place, sir, that room o' Brother Jim's—'tain't no place for a first-class bird to live his whole life, Hawkins."

"Ah, well," I said, "it has to be, Perry, I guess."

That night we took the bird up to the schoolhouse and climbed through a window. We put the cage back in the corner behind the last bench in the schoolroom, and Bill Darby covered it with a cloth he had brought.

"You see," he explained, "if you cover the cage with a cloth nothing will bother the bird or scare it. So, when we all come to school in the morning, nobody will notice anything covered up back here in the corner. Perry, have you fed it for the night?"

"I'll say he has," said I, laughing. "I saw him dump a load of bird seed in."

"All right, then," said Dick Ferris, "come on, fellas, skin out o' here before somebody comes and gives us the dickens for breaking in at night."

As we were going home we heard the far-off sound of Harkinson's horn. "Ah," I said, "it's lucky we did not leave the bird in the clubhouse another night. I bet you ten dollars the Red Runners break into our clubhouse to-night, Jerry."

"Go on," growled Jerry, "you ain't got ten dollars."

. . . . . .

Next morning, bright and early, I hurried to the

schoolhouse. We had planned to get there ahead of our teacher, but just as I started up the steps Bill Darby came slipping out.

"Brother Jim's here already," he whispered. "Gee whiz, Hawkins, I thought we would have plenty of time to get things fixed before he came."

"Gosh, so did I," I said. "Do you think he knows?"

"No," answered Bill; "none of us let on. We all went right to our seats. I glanced at the corner and saw the cage covered with the cloth just as we left it last night."

"Fine," I said. "Do you know your speech by heart, Bill?"

"Every word," answered Bill. "Want to hear it?"

"No, save it," I said. "I'll hear you when you hand him the present. Now, listen, Bill, you got to act quick, see? Just as soon as you and I get in you rush back and get the cage while I say good mornin' and talk to Brother Jim. Then you come back and say your speech and hand it to him. Keep it covered, see, till you say 'we give you this token.' Don't forget, now."

"Oh, I got it all down pat," said Bill. "You just leave it to me."

Bill and I walked into the schoolroom. All the other boys were in their seats, and they looked up with smiling faces as we entered.

"Good morning, teacher," I said, as Bill dodged behind me and shot for the cage.

"Late again, Hawkins," said Brother Jim, "as usual. What makes you sleep so long, anyway?"

But he was smiling, and I kind o' thought he was remembering it was his birthday and didn't want to look cross on this particular day. Before I could answer him, Bill Darby had come back with the cage still

covered with the cloth. I stepped aside. Bill, holding the cage behind his back, walked up in front of the teacher's desk and began his speech. All the boys stood up in their places. Brother Jim sat staring at him while he talked, as though it were a big surprise. I guess he didn't know what was coming off.

"—And this," Bill was saying, "this here, Brother Jim, is just a little token from us boys for your birthday—"

He jerked the cloth from the cage and held it up. The teacher gazed at it, and I saw a smile curve around his lips—I heard some fella giggle behind me—I knew something was wrong—

"Golly Moses," I said to myself, "the cage is empty!"

Oh, boy! There was Bill presenting the teacher with an empty bird cage for a token. Can you beat it? I stepped up quick.

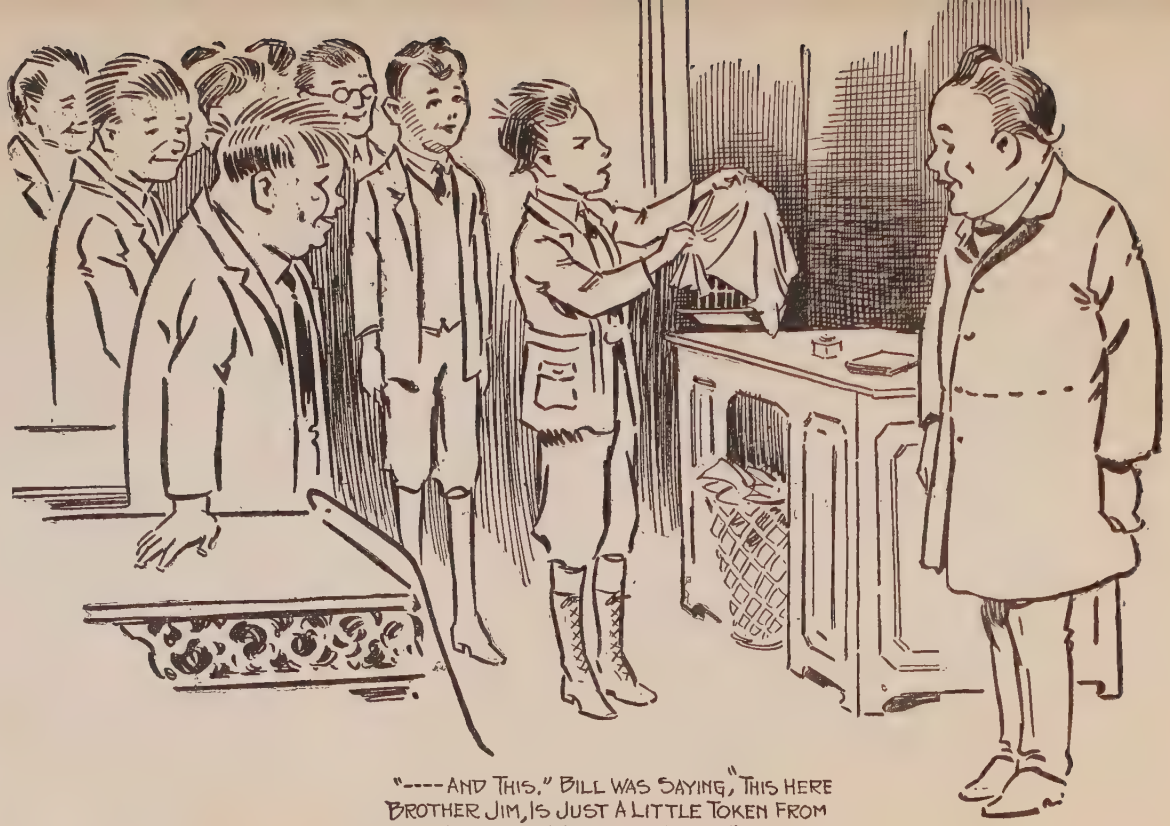
"Excuse me," I said, "maybe—"

But Brother Jim cut me short.

"My dear boys," he was saying, "how can I thank you? It's just like you—and I want to thank you for such a beautiful cage. I was thinking about getting another bird, and here is the cage all ready for it."

How we all got back to our seats I don't know. My head was dizzy. The whole thing was bungled. Sure enough, Brother Jim knew that it wasn't an empty cage we intended to give him. He could tell by the bird seed and the dirt on the bottom of the cage. But he didn't let on. Not him. That's just the kind of a fellow he was. No; he smiled and bowed back at Bill, and said "Thanks" like as if we had given him a fine thing.

"Boys," he said, "it wouldn't be in keeping with the spirit of this kindly show of your regard for me if we did not in some way acknowledge the same. And I



"----AND THIS," BILL WAS SAYING, "THIS HERE BROTHER JIM, IS JUST A LITTLE TOKEN FROM US BOYS FOR YOUR BIRTHDAY."

am sure the Board of Trustees would not mind if we declared this one day a holiday—suppose you put your books away and run along and have a little fun."

It worked. Sure it worked. But none of us felt right about it. We thanked him with a cheery shout. We shook his hand as we filed out the door. And then we gathered at the clubhouse and sat around the table and talked it over.

"How on earth," said our Captain, "did it happen? How did that bird escape? Why, didn't you notice it, Bill, before you went up and shoved that empty bird cage over to him?"

"How was I to know?" cried Bill, and he was ready to cry. Oh, boy! Bill felt awful about it. But Jerry sized it up. He pounded his fist on the table and stood up.

"Listen," he said, "I bet you ten dollars the Red Runners followed us last night and saw us put that bird in the schoolhouse."

"Go on," I said, "you ain't got ten dollars."

After all, what did it matter? Brother Jim acted like he appreciated the cage. And it got us the holiday. And outside I heard the boys yelling and scrambling over a game of snatch-grab football. I sat down at my desk in my little office and began to write about it. Just as I started there came the sound of the door opening. Perry Stokes came in.

"Ah, Perry," I said, "don't you like to play snatch-grab football? Go on, get out and let me write in peace."

"I want to say something, Hawkins," he said in a low voice; he had a troubled look on his face. It was a look that I liked to see there, though. It always meant that Perry would do the best he could.

"Shoot!" I said.

"It's about the bird, sir."

"Have you found it, Perry?"

"No, sir; I let it get away. It was me down in the schoolhouse first this morning, before anybody got there. I had to see that little yella friend once more, sir. Him and me got to be chums, as you would say. I hated to think o' him going up into Brother Jim's darkened room, sir, where the other birds sing. Seems like birds ought to be in the air, Hawkins, where God made 'em to be. But, honest I did not mean to let him get away. He looked so mournful. I says to him: 'Only a few minutes till you go to jail for life,' and I opened the door and held him on my thumb like I always did down here in the clubhouse—"

"What!" I interrupted. "You mean to say you had that canary bird out loose in this clubhouse?"

"Beggin' your pardon, I did, sir, once or twice. He seemed so friendly; he never tried to fly away. He would always come back to the cage. But, somehow, something went wrong with him in the schoolroom this morning, sir. As soon as he was out he looked up at the window; it was open at the top, as the teacher orders, and he didn't say good-bye—"

"Just flew out of the window, eh, Perry?"

"Yes, sir, and was gone. I was afraid of Jerry and Bill, Hawkins. I couldn't tell 'em I did it. You know, they don't like me very well. I hope you won't mention it to a soul, Hawkins."

I slammed my book shut and hammered the stopper on my ink bottle.

"Come on," I said, "let's go and join that game of snatch-grab—and forget about the canary."

Which we did.

XXII

The Hidden Houseboat

THE game of snatch-grab did not last long. A steamboat whistle broke it up and all the fellows ran for the river to watch the Hudson Lee go past. We all knew it was the Hudon Lee. It has the lowest-tone whistle and the loudest of all the steamers that ever passed our town. And the Hudson Lee always brought back happy memories to us boys, memories of good times with the boy after whom this handsome steamer was named, and his pretty little sister Rosalind. Their father, Captain Lee, was on the bridge as she sailed by, and he called to us and waved his hand. We gave him a cheer, and then sat down to watch until the big boat turned the upper bend toward Watertown.

We sat on the bank there, after the boat was out of sight, and talked over old times.

"If we are going after nuts," spoke up Jerry Moore, "we better get a move on. What's the use sittin' here chewin' the rag?"

"I know where you can get some fine beech nuts," said Roy Dobel, "right past my father's place. There's a bunch of beeches there."

So we all started, keeping well under cover of the trees so that, while we could see anything passing on the river, we could not easily be seen ourselves. For we did not care to run into Pelhams or Red Runners today. It was a holiday, and we wanted to have a little fun. I knew that Shadow Loomis and Robby Hood would be at their schools in Watertown, and would not

be able to get down to our clubhouse much before four o'clock, so we had plenty of time to get a sackful of nuts and be back at the clubhouse in time for our regular meeting.

Dobel's farm is not very far from our place on the river bank. A short walk around the base of the cliffs, and then about a half mile, and there is Dobel's. And it wasn't five minutes more until we could see the beeches. We arrived at our nut-picking place before we knew it. We got to work at once, and soon had a nice pile of beech nuts. They are funny-looking little nuts, but sweet—oh, boy, you can't give me a nut half as good as a beech nut. When you taste those little kernels, you know the truth in the old saying that good things come in small packages. Same way with Little Frankie Kane. He was the smallest kid that ever belonged to our bunch, but he was always the nicest, friendliest little kid we ever knew. We wish he was still a member of our club. But best of friends must part.

When we were ready to go back, we found that Perry Stokes was gone. "Where did he go?" asked our captain; "by golly, Hawkins, I feel like firing that kid, he always ducks out when he feels like it without telling us where he is going."

"Hush up," I said in a low voice, "don't let him hear you say that; here he comes on a run."

Perry came running up all out of breath.

"Dick," he said, "the Red Runners are coming—just turned the bend above in a long boat."

"We better take a look," said Dick; "Hawkins, see if you can get our fellows in line and make them stay in line. Maybe we can get by better if we have some order."

I quickly got the fellows in line, two by two, and then Dick and I led the way through the trees to a point

overlooking the river. The long boat of the Red Runners was coming fast, and well it might, for it was being rowed by twenty oars, ten fellows rowing, one sitting in front giving orders to the rowers, and another sitting in the stern at the rudder. What a sight that was! I never saw a boat as long as that on our river. Before we realized it they were speeding past us, their boat cutting the water like a knife and leaving a long trail behind. The fellow in the front seat, who was facing the rowers, held his hand alongside his mouth and kept saying in a slow, sing-song voice: "One, two, one, two," and every time he said "two," those oars struck the water with one single sound—it was like a big machine pushing that boat; no wonder they went so fast. Before we got through wondering about it, they turned out of sight around another crook in the old twisting river.

"Good-night," I said, "think of that, Dick. No wonder the Red Runners can do so many things and get away with it."

"Did you notice the numbers on their sleeves?"asked Jerry Moore.

"They're all numbered," broke in Perry Stokes. "Each one has the number of his importance. Didn't you see Lasky with a seven on his sleeve? He's seventh in line."

"I didn't see No. 1 or 2," said Jerry. "That fellow doing the counting had No. 3 on his arm."

"Get back again," I said, "here comes the rest of the parade."

For I had seen another boat coming from above. It was the long, thin launch, and in it sat two Red Runners. We backed again into the cover of the trees. It took this second boat longer to make the route, for they were paddling canoe fashion. But when they passed

us, I recognized those two figures. The one in front was Long Tom, and behind him was the old hypnotizer, Harkinson. They wore the same kind of sweater and cap as the other Red Runners. I wondered then why it was that they did not wear their broad-brim hats and long coats. But I afterward learned that they wore the sweater and cap in the day, and the other costume in the night-time.

"Yeah," whispered Jerry Moore, "No. 1 and No. 2. Hot dog, some class."

"Hawkins," said Dick, "they're bound for the island."

"I know it," I said.

"Will we take a look and see what they're up to?" asked Dick.

"Sure," said Jerry Moore, "come on back and get our canoes. We might get a chance to trap the whole bunch of 'em in the log house. Then we will come up and get the Sheriff and it's good night Red Runners."

"Don't count your chickens," I said; "it'll be a little risky going up there when we know they have fourteen Red Runners to fight if we are seen."

"Anybody afraid doesn't have to go," said Dick.

"Last one home's a nigger," shouted Jerry, and that settled it, for he started running and all us boys ran after him. We were out of breath when we reached our clubhouse and made hurriedly for our canoes and got them over into the river. Soon we were on our way.

Seven Willows Island is full of beautiful trees; trees, some of them, that don't lose their leaves till real winter is upon them. And it was a beautiful sight with its copper-colored forest, its thick tangle of undergrowth that stretched from the edge of our old camping ground clear across the middle of the island. Plenty of chance for the whole Red Runner army to be hiding,

waiting for us, thought I. Yet I reasoned that they could not know that we had followed them. We could see nothing of their boats. We did not even know whether or not they had landed there. But we ran our canoes into the mud at our old summer camping place, and then hurried into the thicket. Here we halted, and waited for our captain to give us orders.

"We will stay close together," said Dick; "let no one stray away from the crowd, now. If you do, you'll know what to expect. We can't come to help you if you fall into their hands, because they're too many for us."

Suddenly there came a sound to our ears. The Red Runners were on the island. The sound of Harkinson's old horn gave us that information. It came again; two calls on the horn, and I had heard it often enough to know that two blasts was a call for the scattered redcoats to come in.

"Steady," I said, "boys, keep your eyes open and walk slow. The Red Runners are scattered and there may be some right around us."

"Then let's strike out and catch as many as we can," suggested Jerry Moore.

"Nothing doing," broke in Dick sharply; "come ahead, I lead the way; you fellows follow; Hawkins, you bring up the rear and keep your eyes peeled for anybody in back. We will just spy around a bit."

Dick struck out to the left, away from the point where the sound of the horn had come. It was tough going; through the wildest kind of dried-up vines and bushes, some full of thorns, that made our fellows squeal at times as they rubbed a scratched hand or jerked a loose thorn out of their shins. We had walked for about ten minutes or so, when Dick gave a low cry, and we all

"TOGETHER DICK AND I PUSHED THROUGH THE TANGLED WILDWOOD."

came to a halt with a push backward. I hurried around to the front of our group.

"Well, I be dern!" exclaimed Dick.

We had come out again to the edge of the island; a cozy-looking backwater pool was before us, and a tangle of wildwoods, dead now in the cold season, but yet thick and laced together, covered it like a roof. And there, in that backwater pool, that must have been a regular paradise bower in summer-time, was the old houseboat in which the Skinny Guy and his father had lived before they went to Cuba.

"Hold on," I said, "watch your step, Dick. There night be Red Runners hiding in there, waiting for us."

"I got you," replied Dick; "I thought of it right away, Hawkins. It's a dandy place for them to lay a trap."

I took a look around at the faces of our boys. They stood there staring at the old houseboat as though it was an enchanted thing. For it was the old home of their old friend Link, the Skinny Guy, and it brought back many memories of happy days when that skinny kid was here, a member of our club, and one of the best friends we ever had.

"Come on, Hawkins," said Dick, "you and I sneak up and take a look, see. You other fellows stay close together right here, till we call you."

Together Dick and I pushed through the tangled wildwood that hung between us and the houseboat. From the looks of things, no one had ever set foot in the houseboat since Link and his daddy left it. The old plank which led from the shore to the water had slipped off the boat end, but there it was, one end half rotted away in the water. We heaved it up together and set it upon the front porch of the houseboat, and then skipped across.

We tried the door, but it was locked, and then I stepped over and peeped into the window.

"Dick," I said softly, "come here."

Dick came over, and we rubbed the grime off the window glass and peered in.

"What do you think of that?" I asked.

Everything inside was just as it had been left the morning the houseboat had been deserted. The little table in the center of the room was covered with the same ragged table cloth that I had seen upon it many times when Link had lived in the houseboat; upon the table were still the little tin dishes, cups and saucers, one on each side, just as they had served Link and his daddy for their last breakfast in the houseboat; that was the morning they left for Cuba. A tin plate still held a half loaf of bread and a few crusts, green with mold. A china sugar bowl and an empty milk bottle stood in the middle, while a pair of gloves lay on one corner. Everything was covered thick with dust.

I lifted the window. It was not locked; it came up with a few squeaks. I leaped in and Dick followed. Before we knew it, the other fellows had come up and were entering the open window behind us.

"Go back, Perry," said Dick, "one of you will have to stay on the lookout for the Red Runners."

Perry went without any back talk. He is a good kid.

It was a queer feeling we fellows had as we stood in that houseboat again. Funny none of us had ever thought of it since the Skinny Guy went away. The Skinny Guy himself never gave it a thought after he returned from Cuba. And there was plenty of reason for that. I guess he lived in houseboats so long he didn't ever want to see one again.

We all went up the little ladder in the corner, to the

room under the roof. The two cots with their disordered coverlets told us that no one had been there since the Skinny Guy and his pop bid farewell to houseboat life. Link had gone away that morning, thinking he was being parted from his daddy; and then his daddy had suddenly decided to go with Uncle Lucio to the island country to be near his boy; and had got up and had gone, leaving things in the houseboat just as we found them.

We went back downstairs, and stood in little groups, talking in low tones. It seemed like all the boys felt, then, a little blue; for it did bring back thoughts of our Skinny Guy, and Link was a good scout. The fellows thought a lot of him in the good old days. And here was all that belonged to him in the long ago; but our old Skinny Guy was no longer in it. No, he was no longer one of us; for luck had smiled upon Link, and had given him back a mother he had never known, and with that great joy plenty of money so that he never need live in such poverty again.

I found myself staring around the place alone, dreaming of Link and the exciting days I had spent with him in the Caves of Cazanova, and I shook myself and walked over to the door. Jerry had opened it, and was standing there alone, leaning up against the wall, looking out through the tangle of vines that almost hid the houseboat from the island.

"Well, Jerry," I said.

He turned and I saw that his eyes sparkled, as though maybe he felt a little like he wanted to hold back a tear or two. I laughed.

"Link's old home," I said; "doesn't it make you feel—"

"The Red Runners have gone, Hawkins," broke in Perry Stokes as he came up to the door. "Their long

boat and the launch have just passed the first turn in the river."

"That so?" called Dick, coming away from the group of boys in the middle of the room. "Good. Lock up, Hawkins, and fix those vines as they were, so nobody can find this houseboat while we are gone. Come on, everybody out. We've got to get back home. Shadow and Robby will be waiting for us to hold our meeting."

We hurried out, Jerry fastening the door, and he and I together arranged the vines as they had been when we came. And then we slowly made our way to where our canoes lay, and quickly started homeward.

"Hawkins," said Dick, "I want you to write down in your seckatary book about us boys finding back Link's old houseboat. And, say, we ought to write a letter to Link, and tell him all about it."

Which we did.

XXIII

Androfski the Silent

"And I want you boys to know that it is all yours—keep it, Hawkins, for old-times' sake, for I want you fellows to remember me always as I was when you called me

"Your Friend,

"The Skinny Guy."

THAT'S the ending of the letter that we got back from Link when we wrote him about finding his pop's old houseboat in that backwater pool, hidden by the tangle of dead vines on Seven Willows Island. Remember him as he was, huh? As if he wasn't still our friend! Why, sure he was, and always would be. To us Link would always be the Skinny Guy. Makes no difference with us what happens to a fellow that once belonged to our bunch, we always think of him as though he still belonged to us.

And gosh! weren't we all glad to hear from him again! I'll say. He sent a letter to me, but it was for all of the boys, and I had to read it out loud at a meeting in the clubhouse. I had just finished reading it the third time.

"If I ain't askin' you too much trouble," said Jerry Moore, "would you please read it over again slow, Hawkins?"

I looked at our Captain, Dick Ferris, before I made a reply.

"The Seckatary will read it once more," said Dick, hitting the table with his wooden hammer, "and I want you fellas to listen closely, 'cause it's the last time. You'll be having our Seckatary hoarse reading that letter

over and over again. Have a heart, for the love of Mike. Go ahead, Seckatary."

I started once more.

"*Dear Hawkins and all my old friends—I got your letter, telling about you fellows finding the houseboat that belonged to me and pop. It made me feel strange when I read it. But I got reasons for wanting to forget about that old floating house that I used to call home. Yes, pop and me hid it in that backwater pool—the lily pond—that's what we called it. We put it there a long time before Montilla came. No, we didn't want to see it again when we came back from Cuba. Pop never wanted my mother to know. The houseboat days were fine ones for me—you boys never knew how much fun I had—but I'm glad to be past them now. I am glad you fellows found the old houseboat before the Pelhams got next to it. And I want you boys to know that it is all yours—keep it, Hawkins, for old-times' sake, for I want you fellows to remember me always as I was when you called me*

"*Your Friend,*

"*The Skinny Guy.*"

"Well, if he ain't a Prince," exclaimed Bill Darby.

"Who, the Skinny Guy?" Jerry Moore said, with his chin poked out. "Listen, Bill, there ain't a fella even twice my size goin' to say a word about Link when I'm around."

Bang! Dick's wooden hammer hit the table with a whack.

"Say," he said, "you fellows forget we got rules in this clubhouse. You know you ain't allowed to talk free like that while a meeting's going on. Wait till somebody asks you something. What is it, Johnny?"

Johnny McLarren stood up.

"I just happened to think that maybe this old houseboat might be a good headquarters for us boys. Time might come when we are down around that way and need a hiding place to run to. What's the matter with fixing it up? Might even hold a couple of meetings down there once in a while."

"Oh, yes, secret meetings," whispered Jerry Moore; "just like regular big lodges do, and make fellas ride the goat and all that, you know."

"You ain't gonna git me riding any goat," said Roy Dobel.

"Shut up!" yelled our Captain. "Jerry, if I got to tell you once more not to butt in lest you're asked something, out that door you go, hear me?"

"All right, all right," replied Jerry in a low voice, "I just got to talk sometimes; don't mind me if you don't like to hear the sound of my voice."

"I don't mean," continued Johnny, "that we would want to make that our headquarters to meet in all the time. It would be foolish when we have this fine clubhouse. But there might come a time, you know—"

"Good idea," said our Captain. "What you got to say, Hawkins?"

"It's a fine houseboat," I answered, "and it will always remind us of the Skinny Guy and the days when we were smaller kids than we are now. But I ain't saying that it would be safe to hang around it much. We all know the Red Runners go down to the Island—"

"That's just why I think we ought to have it," said Johnny McLarren, " 'cause, you see, Hawkins, it might help us to get a chance to trap the whole bunch of redcoats some time—lock 'em up in the old houseboat and then send somebody up for the Sheriff and his men while we guard them on the outside."

I saw right away that Johnny's idea had caught on with all the other boys. And while I figured it would probably be getting us in trouble sooner or later, I did not say another word for or against. No, sir. I know my fellows. When they get set on a thing, let 'em alone; that's what I say. Because I know it won't do any good to try to talk 'em out of it. Help 'em out of it if they get in trouble, yes; but don't try to talk around Jerry Moore and Johnny McLarren and Dick Ferris. That's three of a kind, and they usually finish what they set out to do.

So at the next two meetings nothing was talked about but the new headquarters we were to fix up in the houseboat on the island. The reason we took our time about it was that we did not want anybody—not a single soul—to know a thing about it. No, not even good old Doc Waters—nobody was to know that we had another headquarters. For we figured out that if even one person knew of it the Red Runners might get on to it, and then—

Shadow Loomis and Robby Hood had not shown up at our meetings for a long time now. What was keeping them in Watertown we did not know. We had not heard a word. We started our meeting every day fifteen minutes later than usual, thinking that maybe one or the other would show up. But neither came. And now it was time to go down to the Skinny Guy's houseboat hidden away in "the lily pond," and fix up our new headquarters.

"It's a shame Shadow and Robby can't go along," said Dick Ferris to me as we followed the other boys out of our clubhouse after the meeting.

"They might come yet," I said; "We held our meeting pretty early after school to-day; they ain't had a chance to get here yet, Dick."

"Suppose you leave a note," said Dick, "and put it on the door. Just write on it 'Gone to the island.' "

I went back into my little office and wrote on a small card:

"Gone to the island. Land your boat at old summer camp place and shout 'Halloo' three times, and I will come and show you the way. Hawkins."

This I tacked upon the door, under the knob. Then Dick and I hurried after the boys who were just getting into the canoes.

No; I'll not forget anything that happened on that trip to the hidden houseboat in "the lily pond." We had landed at the old summer camp spot and pulled our canoes up out of the water and hid them in the woods. It had been rainy weather for a week, and the banks were muddy—yellow mud that sticks to your shoes like the dickens. But how easy it was to find our way, now that we knew. Yet the thorns and briars that attacked our shins and bare hands as we pushed through that tanglewood nearly drove us back. Nearly, I said, for we pushed on as though we were Indians fighting our way out of an enemy's country.

And there, when we reached the old houseboat, we forgot all our scratches and hurts. We felt different, as though we were still clinging to something that belonged to our old Skinny Guy. We set to work with a will, cleaned out the dirt and dust with brooms we had brought, oiled up the rusty hinges and locks, fitted a new key in the front door from a bunch of keys Jerry had brought, and put everything in order. All of the while Dick Ferris went about warning the boys to go about it quietly and not to attract the attention of any Pelhams or Red Runners who might happen to be down on the

"He Simply Stood and Grinned at Us."

island. For we knew that Harkinson had built a log-house on this island in the summer, and it wasn't likely that he would forget about that.

And yet, how things happen, even if you take the most care in the world. We had finished everything, and had locked the houseboat and started back for the river. Just as we came out of the tanglewood at the point where we had hidden our canoes Perry Stokes gave a sharp cry and pointed. We all looked. A few feet ahead of us stood three Red Runners. One of them I knew. He wore a white "7" on his red sleeve; he was Seventh-in-Line Lasky, whom Jerry had captured some weeks ago. The other two were strangers to me. One wore a "3" on his sleeve, and the other a "4." The one with the "3," which meant that he was third in line in the Red Runners, was a dark-skinned fellow with dark, stringy hair and a nose like the beak of a bird. He grinned at us with a sneering look, and in the hollow of his left arm lay a repeating rifle. He simply stood there in front of his two companions and grinned at us.

"Well," said our Captain, "what do you want?"

Third-in-Line turned to Fourth-in-Line, and said something to him in a hoarse whisper. Fourth-in-Line nodded and then said to us:

"Androfski says you must follow us—every one of you."

Jerry Moore stepped up. I tried to catch his arm, but he got by me.

"Listen," he said to the third-in-line Red Runner, "if you're Androfski, why can't you give your own orders without turning around and telling Number Four there what to say."

"Wait," said Fourth-in-Line, "you don't know—Androfski can't talk—he lost his voice when he was little

—we call him Androfski the Silent—but you better do what he says, or you will be sorry."

"I'd like to know why," said Jerry.

Androfski the Silent turned quickly to Fourth-in-Line. The grin went from his face, and I saw an angry look there. He whispered hoarsely again to his companion. Meanwhile, Lasky, seventh-in-line, stood behind the two and said not a word.

"You must come," said Fourth-in-Line, "to the Red Runners' courtroom in the stockade. Androfski the Silent says you are his prisoners, and you must let him take you before the Red Runners right away. Else you will be sorry."

"For what?"chimed in a new voice.

With a glad cry Perry Stokes who had been trembling ever since the Red Runners showed up, ran forward. Androfski the Silent turned, and so did his two pals. They faced Shadow Loomis.

"Ah!"

Shadow Loomis walked up to Androfski and looked straight into his eyes.

"I know, Androfski. The gun's not loaded. Put it down and take off your coat. We will settle our old quarrel right away. I've been waiting for a chance to meet you away from that Red bunch of yours. Are you ready for it?"

Surely Androfski was ready. He showed that by the way he dropped his gun, threw his cap on the ground, and backed away while he doubled up his fists. Just as Shadow stepped forward Fourth-in-Line darted to the gun, picked it up and ran away with it into the woods. Seventh-in-Line Lasky, seeing this, turned and followed after him. Androfski the Silent was deserted, alone, facing his enemy, Shadow Loomis.

No matter what else I may write about Androfski the Silent, this one thing I'll say for him right now. He was game. Game as the gamest fighter I ever saw. There we were, a dozen of us in back of Shadow Loomis, but Androfski was all alone, deserted, and yet he stood up with his bare fist and did the best he could against a boy whom he had a grudge against and who had a grudge against him. And he got the first blow, too, a right-hand punch to the jaw that sent Shadow back a step or two, but Shadow only smiled and gritted his teeth. Then, as Shadow stepped up quickly to give him one—it's funny about this rule of the Red Runners—came the sound of Harkinson's horn. As far as Androfski the Silent was concerned, the fight was over. I saw him turn his bird-like nose for an instant in the direction of the sound of that horn; the next second he had stooped and snatched his cap from the ground and was gone—to answer the call of the horn—the call of the leader of his gang.

We stood there on the sloping bank, our old summer camping place, and watched him disappear—silent as was his name—like a smudge of red among the dead trees of the woods. Then Shadow laughed.

"He's gone," he said, "and I thought sure we could settle it this time. What you fellows come down here for, anyway?"

We stood there and told Shadow about the hidden houseboat. He wanted to go back with us right away and have a look at it. I said we better not try it to-day, as this rumpus with the Red Runners had taken all the gumption out of me. I'd feel safer back home. But Dick and Jerry were about to go back through the tanglewood with Shadow, when out of the dead timber

came a figure—a red coat—by golly, it was Seventh-in-Line Lasky!

He came right up to me.

"Go," he said in a breathless voice, "go, Hawkins, they're coming—all of 'em. Harkinson—he knows you're here; Fourth-in-Line Oder told him, and they've got sixteen—you've no chance—go, quick."

"But, Lasky—" I said.

"You did me a good turn once—you turned me loose when your gang caught me, and, Hawkins, I ain't forgot it; now, go before they come—they're too many against you."

Without another word Seventh-in-Line darted into the woods again and was lost among the trees.

"That's the first Red Runner I ever knew to do that—" said Shadow Loomis.

"Come on," I broke in, "we can talk about it better in our own clubhouse."

Which we did.

XXIV

Saving the Secret

TWO days later Shadow Loomis and Robby Hood showed up together for our meeting in the clubhouse. Shadow was quiet all during the meeting. As soon as it was over he said to me:

"Hawkins, I want to go down to see the hidden houseboat that used to belong to Link. Robby knows about it. I told him. And he wants to go, too. We are anxious to see the old place the Skinny Guy used to live in."

"Ask our Captain," I said.

Dick had been standing right beside us.

"Of course they can go," he said. "I was going to suggest a trip down there, anyway. Tell the boys to get out the canoes."

In five minutes we were on the water, heading south for the island. It was a clear afternoon, although the cold weather was beginning to remind us that winter was about to wrap us in a blanket of snow. However, the paddling kept us pretty warm, and we reached our old summer camping ground in a little while. We pulled up our boats and hid them as we had done on our previous visits, and then struck out through the tangled woods for the backwater pool—"the lily pond," as Link called it. It would have been wiser to cut our way through as we went, so that we would not always have to fight the thorns and stickers when we came to the houseboat. But our Captain gave orders that nothing was to be changed; if we made a path that would be easy for us to get through it would be easy as well for the Red

Runners or the Pelhams. And we intended that nobody should know about our secret headquarters in this quiet spot.

"Oh, boy, what a beauty," said Shadow Loomis, as he caught his first look at the old houseboat through the lacing of the old vines. "Good-night, Hawkins, if the Red Runners ever see that, you fellas won't own it any more."

"I know it," I said; "that's the reason we must keep it a secret."

Shadow shook his head. "I'm afraid we can't," he said. "I'm afraid they kind o' think we got something like this. They've seen some of us down here several times. I kind o' think—"

"Look here, Shadow," I said suddenly, "what's on your mind? I bet I know why you came down here. You think you'll get a chance to meet Androfski again. You figured he would be down here, didn't you?"

Shadow laughed.

"Good boy," he said; "you sure got some think cap, Hawkins, old top. Sure, you bet, I expected Androfski to be down here. And I'll bet he's here, too."

Jerry Moore was unlocking the door as we brought up the rear of the line at the houseboat. While the others crowded forward onto the gang-plank that led to the houseboat porch I waited on the bank. As I looked down at my muddy shoes my eye happened to see footprints in the mud around the water's edge. I stooped down and looked at the marks carefully. No boy in our bunch had such big feet to make those large footprints.

"Shadow," I called.

He turned and came back to me.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Look," I said, pointing at the marks in the mud. "I guess you are right; looks like our houseboat has been discovered. Those footprints might have been made by Androfski."

Shadow stooped and looked at the prints, and then turned to me with a shake of his head.

"No," he said, "not Androfski. Most likely a Red Runner, but not Androfski. I know every little mark of that fella; this footprint's not been made by him."

"Come in, you fellas," called Dick, and we went into the houseboat. The boys had arranged in the middle of the floor the old table that was formerly used by Link and his daddy, and had put chairs around it, odd chairs, most of them broken, and only a few with backs, and some made out of rough wood, cut from trees on the river bank. We all gathered around the table, taking the same places that we occupied at meetings in our clubhouse. Dick Ferris pulled his little wooden hammer from his pocket and hit the table with it.

"Order," he said; "fellas, the first meeting in our secret headquarters will come to order."

Somehow it felt strange to us. We all sat there for a minute as quiet as though we were in church. No telling how long we would have sat there that way if Dick hadn't hit the table another whack with his hammer.

"Well, wake up," he said; "what's the idea of a meeting if you fellas want to sit there looking at one another? Come on, get up, somebody, say something."

As for me, I didn't care to say anything. I was thinking about the Skinny Guy—what would he say if he could see us now, his old pals, sitting around his old table in his old home, calling to order the first secret meeting of our little gang?

"This is the time to make new rules," said Jerry

Moore, standing up and leaning his hands on the table. " 'Cause I think you have to lay them rules right away, Dick, if this houseboat is to be kept a secret. If we don't have rules one of us is goin' to go blundering right into something that'll bring the whole Pelham bunch right into this here secret headquarters, or what's worse, the Red Runners—"

"Yes, yes," said Dick, "that's right, Jerry. Now, listen, fellas, and listen good. If we want to do this thing right we must make these rules. First, no fella is allowed to come down here by himself; no fella is allowed to come down here with another fella unless he gets permission from me or Hawkins. I hope you all understand that."

Every boy nodded his head. "Sure," they said, "Some said, "of course"; others said, "that's right." I didn't say anything.

"And whatever you do," continued Dick, "never tell anybody, not even your mother or your sister or your cousin, or nobody, about this secret houseboat headquarters. Nobody will ever know then that we can sneak away to this hiding place. Nobody will ever know that this old houseboat is here."

"Somebody knows it already," I said.

"What!"

Dick jumped up. The other fellows turned and looked at me. They all had surprise on their faces. Only Shadow Loomis smiled and kept his seat.

"Yeah," I said, "somebody's been here this very day, peeking in the windows there. If you'll go outside you'll see his footprints in the mud on the bank."

All of the fellows but Shadow and I went outside to look for the marks I had spoken of. Shadow and I heard them talking in low tones, comparing their own

shoe bottoms with the marks in the mud. They hurried back, led by Dick.

"By Golly, you're right, Hawkins," said Dick. "Now, what's to do?"

"There's only one thing to do," said Shadow quietly, "and that is to get the fella who found out our secret. If he is a Red Runner turn him over to the Sheriff. If he is only a Pelham give him a licking and tell him he'll get another if he opens his mouth about this hidden houseboat."

Dick shook his head and sat down. He rested his elbows on the table and sunk his chin in his hands.

"Oh, Lord," he said, "it's always something. If it ain't one thing it's another. What chance have we got to catch that fella? Now, we might as well make up our mind to give up this houseboat purty soon. Oh, gee, I wish somebody else was Captain instead of me."

Lew Hunter stepped over, and with a laugh, slapped our Captain on the back.

"Cheer up, old scout," he said, "don't give up the ship. Come on, you fellas, this is the first meeting in our Skinny Guy's old houseboat. Let's make it sound cheerful—stand up, all of you—that's the way—now, come on, join in—

"Weep no more for me,
We will sing one song of my old Kentucky Home—"

The boys sang. There never was a time when Lew Hunter started a song that those boys didn't join in. Lew had them all trained. There was something of a music master about Lew that the boys did not understand, and did not try to understand. Whenever he sang they sang, too; that was all there was to it. How those harmonizing voices swelled through that old house-

boat! Gosh, we might have known that it would have been heard—

"Red Runners!" cried Roy Dobel, pointing at the window. The singing broke off suddenly as we turned our eyes to the window. Only for an instant did the face linger at the window pane—a face that somewhere I had seen, but could not place. Only for an instant, I say, and then it was jerked back. I saw a red sleeve—

"He's all by himself," shouted Shadow Loomis— "get him, fellas. Come on, everybody after him. Don't let him get out of sight, Hawkins."

For I was the first one out of the door. I saw the red jacket cutting it as fast as he could. Through the thorn and sticker patch, and then out under the trees; the whole bunch in back of me shouting and yelling, and the running redcoat ran faster than he would have run if he had not been so badly scared.

As I sit here in my little office room, writing about this, I can't help laughing at the foolish way we yelled and ran. What if the Red Runners had all been hiding somewhere? Suppose they had all been behind that thicket of thorn? Lucky for us they were not. No, there were no others—only this one. He ran for the big log house at the other end of the island, the stockade that Harkinson and the Pelhams had built last summer. He reached it far ahead of any of us. And slammed the door. I heard it being bolted on the inside as we came up.

"Well," I said, as Shadow came up out of breath, "he's there. But he has locked us out."

"Not me," said Shadow Loomis. "No Red Runner can lock me out. Give me a boost, Jerry."

Jerry and I gave him our hand and he lifted himself up the side of the log house. With a swing he reached the roof.

"Watch out down there, now," he called.

I saw his purpose in a second. There was a wide chimney, made of rocks and mud, built against one side of the log house. Shadow stopped a moment to look into it; the next second he was putting his foot over the edge, getting into it. We saw him let himself down easy into the chimney. I wondered if the Red Runner inside knew what we were doing. I ran to the door and began pounding on it to get his attention away from the fireplace. Then I heard a cry of surprise from inside. I heard the bolt shot back and felt the door give way. Jerry and I pushed hard and rushed in.

Shadow and the Red Runner were scrambling around the loghouse floor together. Oh, how that Red Runner fought! He was like a wildcat, and he was much the best, because he was bigger and older than Shadow Loomis. But Jerry and I hurried to his help, and soon we were sitting on top of the redcoat. Perry Stokes brought some rope, and we tied his arms fast and made him sit up. On his sleeve there was the number "4." One look at his face and I remembered him. He was the one who had been with Androfski and Seventh-in-Line Lasky the day they surprised us, the day Shadow Loomis and Androfski had the fight.

"Your name is Oder," I said. "Fourth-in-Line Red Runner. Is that right?"

"You said it," replied Fourth-in-Line in a very sulky tone.

"When did you discover our houseboat in the backwater?" asked Dick Ferris.

"Yesterday."

"Anybody else seen it besides you?"

"Find out for yourself."

"I RAN TO THE DOOR AND BEGAN POUNDING ON IT TO GET HIS ATTENTION AWAY FROM THE FIREPLACE."

Dick looked at Shadow and me. "Suppose he ain't the only one," he said. "Suppose those footprints were made by another Red Runner."

We made our prisoner march ahead of us back to the houseboat. When we compared the footprints with his big shoes we saw at once that it was he who had walked in the mud there.

"It's him," said Shadow. "He's the one."

"Well, fellas," I said, "what'll we do with him?"

"Turn him over to the Sheriff," said Jerry Moore.

"Oh, listen," I said, "if this was Harkinson or Long Tom, you know, why sure. I'd turn him over right away. But we've only seen this Fourth-in-Line fella twice—"

"Only this," broke in Shadow Loomis, "you boys want to keep your hidden houseboat a secret, don't you?"

"Of course we do."

"Well, then, there's only one way to keep it a secret now. This fellow is in on the secret. He knows where the houseboat is; we saw him looking in the window. Of course he will tell the other Red Runners. And they would be there as soon as they could get there. But if the Sheriff gets him he will be put somewhere where he can't get out for a while. The only way to keep your secret is to turn him over to the Sheriff."

Which we did.

XXV

Lasky Goes Home

WE HELD a meeting in our clubhouse next day after school. All of us boys talked only about Oder, Fourth-in-Line Red Runner, whom we had captured and turned over to the Sheriff. He was brought before old Judge Granbery, and, although he was careful in his answers to the Judge's questions, he wasn't quite slick enough for the old Judge, and the result was that the Judge got the idea that he was a pretty bad boy, and that it would be best to put him somewhere where he could do no more harm. The last I heard about it was that the Sheriff was taking him to Watertown to put him in some school there where he would have to stay until he became a good boy.

"Well," I said to Shadow Loomis, "it's one Red Runner less to be afraid of. But I wish it had been Harkinson instead of Oder. As long as Harkinson is free I'm always going to be uneasy."

"I wish it had been Androfski," he said. "Androfski the Silent. I tell you, Hawkins, Harkinson ain't half as bad as Androfski. If you should ever get to know him as well as I do—"

"What's the use picking out any single one of 'em?" broke in Jerry Moore. "Catch the whole bunch at once —that's what I say."

"But that's what you can't do," said Shadow Loomis. "Look here, Jerry, you tell us how to do it, and I'll help you if the others won't."

"Gimme time," said Jerry. "I'm thinkin' up a way.

You'll see, Shadow. I'll have 'em all marching up to the Sheriff some day."

I smiled at Jerry.

"He's got a bad habit, Jerry has," I said to Shadow Loomis. "He counts chickens. But if he does figure out a way he's better'n I am. You can count on my help, too, Jerry."

"On all of us," said our Captain, Dick Ferris. "If Jerry or anybody else can figure out a way to trap the whole gang of Red Runners, it's our duty to see that it's done."

Doc Waters came down to our clubhouse after the meeting. I was left alone in my little office, and he scared me when he suddenly said:

"Glad to find you here, Hawkins, old boy. The Judge asked me to see you. He wants to talk to you."

"Wait," I said, "I'll call the boys. They're out in the hollow. We will all go up."

"No," said Doc, "he wants to see you alone."

"Good Lord, Doc," I said, "have I done something?"

Doc laughed.

"I don't think so," he said. "I think he wants to see you on business."

"Oh," I said, "he's got a job for me, huh? Oh, well, come on, I'm ready."

The old Judge sat in his dusty office with his feet upon his desk, and his hat shoved back upon his half-bald head. He scowled through his spectacles at the sound of our footsteps, but smiled when he saw who it was.

"Sit down," said the Judge shortly. We both took seats. I twirled my hat in my hands while I wondered what was coming. It was a long time before he spoke.

Then he said: "How long have you known this gang of boys who call themselves the Red Runners?"

"I've known some of 'em a long time, Judge," I answered, "and there's a lot of 'em I don't know at all."

"Can you give me their names?"

"No, sir. Not all of 'em. The leader is Long Tom. He used to bum around with Stoner's Boy—you remember Stoner, Judge."

"Yes, yes. I suppose these boys are of the same brand."

"Worse—lots worse. These fellas don't stop at anything, Judge. Stoner was never so bad as Harkinson—"

"Harkinson? That's the name of another one?"

"Yes, sir. "He's second-in-line, sir."

"Second-in-line? Just what does that mean, Hawkins?"

"Well, Judge, they all have numbers. Wear 'em on their sleeves. You see, Long Tom is the leader, so he is Number One. Harkinson is next, so he wears Number Two. Androfski—"

"Androfski? Is that another one's name? Doctor, wasn't there an Androfski--"

"Yes, Judge," said Doc Waters, "that was the name of the fellow who got seven years—you were the Judge at his trial, you will remember—"

"Ah, yes, now I remember," interrupted Judge Granbery, "he broke out and tried to throw an exploding bomb in my window."

"That's the one," said Doc. "This might be a relative of his—perhaps his son for all we know."

"Go ahead, Hawkins. That makes three names we have. Any others?"

"Oder—he was the one we caught, you know. He was fourth-in-line."

The Judge nodded. "Yes, he's safe for a while. I hope we will be able to send the rest of them to keep him company very shortly. How many others do you know?"

"Only one, Judge," I answered, "his name being Lasky, seventh-in-line."

"Seventh-in-line," the Judge repeated; then he chuckled and looked up at Doc Waters. "It's remarkable, isn't it, Doctor, how they go about their business? You wouldn't imagine boys to organize and keep such order, would you?"

"They're all much older boys than Hawkins and his playfellows, Judge," said Doc, "and it is really a shame for such bigger boys to come around here to annoy our youngsters."

The Judge looked serious.

"Hawkins," he said, "I don't have to warn you. These boys from up the river are not safe for you boys to deal with. You understand?"

"Yes, sir," I replied, "but we never start any trouble, Judge, I'll give you my word. It's only when they come down the river bank that we get mixed up with 'em. And we've got to fight back, Judge; we've got to take our own part."

The Judge smiled.

"To be sure, Hawkins," he said; "but it is best that we put a stop to it as soon as possible. I always call you boys my junior police, and you have always kept order and done the right thing, and I am proud of you—our whole town is proud of you. But we do not want boys from other towns coming in here and making trouble. I suppose they will try harder than ever now to get you, because you caught one of their pals. That is why I sent for you. You must not give them a chance to catch one of you. And you have given me the names of

five of these boys. I will have the Sheriff of Watertown to look them up and see if he cannot get them. Meantime, try to get the names of the rest of them."

"I'll try," I said, shaking my head doubtfully, "but I don't believe the Sheriff of Watertown will ever get his hands on 'em, Judge. They're too slick for him."

"We shall see," said Judge Granbery. "That will be all, Hawkins, you can go now."

. . . . . .

I hurried back down to the clubhouse. Shadow and Robby Hood were just ready to leave in their launch. They came back with me, and we went into my little writing office and I told them what the Judge said to me.

"It's fine for him to try to help," said Shadow Loomis, "but it won't do any good. Nobody in Watertown knows where those boys have their headquarters. If they did the Sheriff up there could have caught 'em long ago—or at least a few of 'em."

"Don't you know all their names, Shadow?" I asked.

"No," he answered. "I don't know any but Harkinson and Androfski—those two always stuck together."

"I was in their headquarters last year," said Robby Hood; "that was the old place in the old wharfboat. But, since the time they broke the big plate-glass window in that Main Street store, they moved out of their old headquarters, and nobody has been able to find out where they moved to. But the time I was in their old headquarters I noticed they had a printed list of the names of the Red Runners, showing each one's number, you know."

"Ah," said Shadow, "if we could only find out where they meet—"

We heard a shouting in the hollow—our boys were yelling and running. The next instant we heard the front door of the clubhouse open quickly and slammed shut again. I stepped through the curtains of my office doorway and looked out into our meeting room.

A Red Runner stood there. He was peeping out of the corner of the front window.

"Well, hello!" I said.

The Red Runner turned like a flash. He wore a "7" on his sleeve. It was Lasky.

"Listen!" he said, holding his finger to his lips. I heard the sound of our boys outside, shouting and yelling as they ran past. "They'll not come in here," said Lasky. "They wouldn't think I'd dare to hide in here, would they?"

"Lasky," I said, "it seems as though it doesn't make any difference. We can't let you go, you know. Not this time."

"All right," he said, "just so they don't get their hands on me. That big Jerry fella hates me. Him and the others would give me an awful licking, Hawkins, and I know you will play fair with me. I was just trying to get to my boat. I would have gotten away if I hadn't slipped. It's muddy there on the side of the hollow."

"You've been spying again, eh, Lasky?"

"Yes, it was my turn. I had to come. It's the first time I had a turn spying since the time you let me go, Hawkins."

"You're going to the Sheriff this time, Lasky," I said.

He gave me one look. Oh, boy! I wish he hadn't given me that one look. It made me feel sorry for Lasky.

"WELL, HELLO!" I SAID.
THE RED RUNNER TURNED
LIKE A FLASH, HE WORE
A "7" ON HIS SLEEVE.
IT WAS LASKY."

He didn't seem to me as bad as the other Red Runners. He wasn't as big as the others. I thought, maybe, he had a mother somewhere—

"Lasky," I said, "where'd you come from—where's your home?"

"Down in Kentucky—I lived in the country before I came to Watertown."

"Came up here to get a city job, didn't you? Yes, I know. Then you met this Red Runner gang, and just went from bad to worse. Is your mother living?"

"I ain't heard for nearly a year, Hawkins." Lasky's voice was low.

"She'd be mighty proud of you, wouldn't she, Lasky, if she knew where you were and what you were doing instead of having a good job and working honest. Wouldn't she be happy to know?"

Lasky looked down upon the floor. He couldn't look me in the face when I told him that. I knew it hurt him, but I wanted it to. I felt sorry for Lasky.

"Lasky," I continued, "it ain't too late for you to save yourself. You're only a kid—there's a big life ahead of you. I'll give you one more chance to get away, Seventh-in-Line Lasky. Will you listen to me?"

"Don't ask me to squeal on the Red Runners, Hawkins," he said, looking up. "I ain't the best fella on earth, but that ain't ever been said about me yet. I won't snitch."

"No," I said to him, "I won't ask you to give away any secrets. I've got one thing to ask of you if you want to go free. What do you say?"

Lasky dropped his head on one shoulder, as if he were tired, and sat down in our Captain's chair.

"I don't care what happens any more," he said, in a tired voice. "I ain't had much fun out of life, Hawkins."

"Well, listen to me, Lasky," I said. "Cut loose from this Red Runner gang. Make up your mind to quit right now. Go back to your mother—"

Seventh-in-Line Lasky started up.

"That's where I belong," he said. "She ain't seen me for more 'n a year—"

"Go back to her, boy," I said. "Wherever she is—take off that red jacket and put on a plain one and go back home where you belong."

Lasky looked at me for a minute without speaking. Then his eyes wandered over to where Shadow and Robby Hood stood.

"They're all right," I said. "What I say goes. What are you going to do?"

Lasky's lips parted as if he wanted to say something; but no words came. Instead there came tears in his eyes, and he bowed his head on his arm and leaned upon the table. I made a motion to Shadow and Robby and we moved back into my little writing room and left the Seventh-in-Line alone to make up his mind. We could hear him sobbing in the other room, and I knew the poor kid felt awful.

"You did right, Hawkins," whispered Shadow Loomis. "It wouldn't have done any good to turn him over to the Sheriff."

No one said a word after that. The little old brass clock on my desk ticked away the minutes, and we all stood around trying to think of something cheerful. The silence was broken at last by the sound of our boys outside coming back again thinking that Lasky had escaped them.

"Here, Hawkins."

Lasky stood between the curtains of my doorway holding out his red sweater. He had taken it off. He

had made up his mind to cut loose from the Red Runners.

"Now, I'm going," he said. "You'll never have anything to blame me for again."

"Wait a minute," said Shadow Loomis. He pulled off his cap and coat, and then drew over his head the black-and-white sweater that he wore. "Here, Lasky," he said, "it's cold. You'll need something to keep you warm. I'll trade you."

Lasky accepted the black-and-white sweater, and both Shadow and Robby helped him on with it. He had no sooner finished putting it on when we heard our boys rush up on the front steps. Shadow snatched the red sweater out of my hand and threw it behind my desk. Robby and Shadow stepped up in front of Lasky so that they hid him out of sight.

Jerry Moore led the boys in. "His footprints led up to the porch," he was saying to them. "We were fools not to look for that in the first place. Hello, Hawkins, how long you been here?"

"All the time," I answered, "ever since the meeting."

"Well, then," said Jerry, "there's a Red Runner hiding in here somewhere. He fooled us, but we came back and followed his tracks. They led right to the porch here. He must 'a' come in. Where is he?"

"Nobody wearing a Red Runner's sweater is in this clubhouse," I said.

Jerry scratched his head and looked sore. The other boys crowded behind him. Then Jerry walked over to Shadow and Robby. "Ah, what's this?" he said. "I see. Stand aside, you fellas."

They stepped aside. Lasky stood forth, but no longer Seventh-in-Line. He was a different boy in the black-

and-white sweater. Jerry Moore looked him full in the face for a minute, then his glance fell upon the black-and-white sweater.

"You're sure there is no Red Runner here, Hawkins?" he said to me.

"Quite sure," I answered, "there is no Red Runner here now."

Jerry nodded his head. Then he turned to the other boys.

"Stand back there," he ordered. "Let this fella have plenty of room."

They fell back and formed a line on either side. Lasky stepped forward quickly, and walked through the lines. He carried his cap in his hand, and his head was bent down. At the door he paused, then he turned and looked back at us.

"Good-bye," he said, in a low voice. "It looks like it's going to snow. What a fine Christmas it'll be. And I'm going home—I'll be there in time to wish her a Merry Christmas, Hawkins."

Then he was gone. Through the window we watched him as he flew down the river path to his boat that he had hidden somewhere, and I waited to see which way he would go. He dodged out of sight for a few minutes. When he appeared again he was in his boat on the river, rowing fast. And it was not going to Watertown.

Jerry came over and shook my hand. "Good, old Hawkins," he said in a low tone.

"You understand how it was, Jerry?" I asked.

He nodded. "I know your ways, Seckatary," he said.

While we were talking I watched Shadow Loomis out of the corner of my eye as he backed toward my desk

and stooped for something on the floor. He had his back turned as he buttoned up his coat, but I knew he was hiding Lasky's old red sweater under his jacket.

"We've got to be going," he said. "You fellas might as well walk down to the boat and see us off."

Which we did.

XXVI

A Bag of Toys

CHRISTMAS EVE! How pleasant it sounded as I said it to myself on my way down to our headquarters after supper. The snow was flying thick and fast, and it sure seemed like old times. As I neared the clubhouse in the hollow I could see through the window the tiny lights of the candles on the Christmas tree that the boys had set up and I knew the boys were already there, because I heard the opening strains of *Adeste Fideles* as Lew Hunter began to play the organ. It was the Latin song we had been practicing for the last two weeks; the preacher had asked Lew to teach us that song so we could sing it early Christmas morning in the church.

I waited there by the door until the end of the song. Then I clapped my hands.

"Fine, fellas," I said, "you certainly have taught them their parts, Lew. Golly, but you sure can sing low notes loud, Jerry."

"It will sound better with you, Hawkins," said Lew. "Come on, try this second verse. We will sing two, you know, in the morning."

Well, we sang the next verse, but I didn't notice that my voice made any difference, except maybe it made the singing a little worse than it was without me, but it was suddenly stopped by the sound of a bell outside, and before we could get to the door it opened and in came Doc Waters, dressed up like Santa Claus.

"Well, boys," he hollered, grinning at us, "how do I look, hey? Got to play Santa Claus for Ben Bigstaff's

little kids, so I thought I'd drop in here first and see that you fellas got a present, too. How do I look, Hawkins, old boy?"

"Fine, Doc," I said, "I always knew you would make a good Santy Claus. Gee, Ben Bigstaff's kids will be tickled when they see you. What you got in the sack?"

"Oh, toys and trinkets and things the kids like," said Doc, putting down the big pack on a chair. "See if you can fasten the strap on my shoulder, boys. Now, when I stoop down. Wait a minute, don't put that bell in the bag. Got to have that to wake the kids up with when I come. Here, git out o' that, Bill Darby. What you so anxious to close her up for? Wait till I git this —clumsy bundle—out. There y'are. You pass 'em around, Hawkins. One for every fella in the clubhouse— Shadow Loomis and Robby Hood, too. Good-night, and a Merry Christmas to you all."

"Good-night, Doc," we all hollered at once. "Same to you, Doc. Thank y' very much, Doc."

And with his pack on his back old Santa Claus Doc Waters went out into the snowstorm. We all crowded around as Bill Darby untied the bundle and took out of it a lot of the finest pocket-knives we had ever seen, and each boy had his name carved in the handle. Just like good old Doc; always a friend of us boys. We never had a better friend than Doc Waters. I put the two knives aside for Shadow and Robby, for I expected them to show up. I didn't think they would pass us up on Christmas Eve.

"Put new candles on the tree, fellas," said our Captain, "these have burned low; don't let 'em burn too low or they might set the tree afire."

It must have been about half an hour later when, just as we were ending up the old shepherd's song,

Shadow Loomis and Robby Hood came in. Robby rushed in first and held the door open while Shadow dragged in some heavy thing. As soon as he had it in the light I saw it was the pack of toys that good old Doc Waters had on his back when he left.

"Good-night, Shadow!" I exclaimed, "what's this mean? How'd you come by that bag o' toys?" Shadow gave one of his funny little laughs, while Robby Hood blurted out:

"We swiped it out of a cheese hole somebody has on Burney's Field."

"Red Runners," said Shadow. "We followed a bunch of 'em down here. Had a chance to follow 'em and they went for Burney's Field. You can see their bonfire from here. Got a Christmas tree and everything; but you'd never know it lest somebody would lead you to it. We found this pack o' toys hidden there. What would they be doing with it? Must of swiped it, I says to Robby, so we just brought it along until we could find somebody who lost it."

"I can tell you that quick enough," I said. And then I told them about Doc coming in dressed as Santa Claus, to take these toys to Ben Bigstaff's kids. "Now, what I want to know, Shadow," I said, "is how they got hold of Doc's bag of toys, when we know we strapped it to his shoulder so it wouldn't come off easy."

Before Shadow could answer there was a pounding on the door, a pounding as if somebody wanted to break it down. Jerry Moore rushed to the door and pulled it open. Into the room, without waiting to be asked, walked a Red Runner—walked right up to the table and stood there beside the Christmas tree.

It was Androfski the Silent. Under his beak of a nose his lips curved into a smile like a little half moon.

He stood still, his rifle resting in the crook of his arm. He waited for me to say something. We were all a little excited, but I tried not to show how excited I was.

"Merry Christmas, Androfski," I said; "sounded like you was trying to break our door down."

His lips moved. He replied something, but I could not hear his voice.

"Watch his lips, Hawkins," said Shadow in a whisper; "you can't hear his voice."

I stepped up closer and turned my ear to his lips.

"What did you say?" I asked.

Then, for the first time, I heard Androfski speak and I knew why they called him Androfski the Silent. His voice was like a thin whisper. I could just barely make out his words, but I missed every other syllable—

"You—watch my lips—" I heard. "That's how—others—understand—"

Ah! poor old Androfski. In spite of all that I had heard of his wicked deeds I felt sorry for the Silent Third-in-Line. I stepped back and watched his face. Shadow Loomis tried to step up to him, but I saw Shadow's fists were doubled up and I pulled him back by my side.

"Go on, Androfski," I said; "I will watch your lips. Speak slowly."

"Thanks," his lips said to me; I had thought it would be hard for me to understand him, but I was surprised how easily I could see him say "thanks." He spoke very slow.

"Your boys have stolen from us. This is Christmas. We do not care to have any trouble with you on this night. Christmas means the same to us as it does to you. You are fair-minded; you won't let them keep what they have stolen, Hawkins."

"MERRY CHRISTMAS, ANDROFSKI," I SAID.

"Don't let him get away with that soft talk, Hawkins," said Shadow Loomis; "make him lay down that gun and him and I will settle our old fight right here."

"Easy, Shadow," I said. "It's Christmas. Look here, Androfski, is this the stuff my boys have taken from you?" I pointed to the bag of toys.

"Yes," replied the silent one in his silent way, "they took that away from us."

"Well, then," I said, "we happen to know this bag o' toys. How did you come by it?"

I watched for a reply on those silent lips, but none came. The grin disappeared from Androfski's face and his lips were pressed shut in a thin line.

"Androfski," I said, "we think you've stolen this bag yourselves. We will let you tell the Sheriff where you got it. You are our prisoner, Androfski. Lock that door, Jerry."

As if the wind had pushed it, the door opened before Jerry could get to it and in walked Harkinson—yes, the old hypnotizer himself, dressed in red sweater and cap.

"Merry Christmas, all," he said with that old smile that I had first seen last summer upon the island. "I hope you are glad to see me. I heard everything you said to Androfski; he's my pal, you know, and if you really mean to turn him over to your Sheriff, I hope you will take me with him. He can't talk, you know. I always like to stay close by Androfski, I do. We're awful good pals, me and him."

Now, I don't know what it is about Harkinson that makes us feel strange when he is near us, but I tell you that the minute he stepped in we all fell back as if a

powerful wind had struck us. I jumped up, however, and yelled:

"Get around them, fellas! Don't let them get a chance to get out. Harkinson, you'll get your wish. To-night both of you go up to the Sheriff's office. I'm sorry it had to be on Christmas Eve, that's all."

Harkinson, standing beside Androfski, turned and grinned at me.

"Don't be afraid, my dear Seckatary," he said, "I know when the jig's up. We are in your hands. I ain't kicking about nothing."

Jerry, Bill, and Johnny had hurried around to the front. We were surrounding the two Red Runners. "Get some rope, Roy Dobel," ordered our Captain; "I'll take your gun, Androfski."

Androfski handed over the rifle and as he did so I saw the words "Christmas gift" form on his lips; then he smiled that little half-moon smile under his beak nose. Jerry must not have locked the door very tight, for a sudden strong wind blew it open and a bushel of snowflakes blew in. I turned my eyes quick enough to see Harkinson jerk his old brass horn from under his red sweater, and raising it to his lips, blew two loud blasts upon it before any of us could get to it. I yelled. Shadow Loomis sprang at Androfski. Jerry Moore flung both arms around Harkinson, but the two Red Runners laughed loud and shoved us aside.

"Change your mind, Seckatary," laughed Harkinson; "my boys have heard that sound of the horn. They'll all be here in three minutes—I told 'em to wait right under the trees outside—by golly, here they are now."

And they came. Golly Moses, how they came! Three at a time they leaped into that door. What

chance had we against that army of red-jackets? Jerry and Shadow flew again at Androfski and Harkinson. I saw two Red Runners leap upon Dick Ferris, and I also noticed that Perry Stokes and Bill Darby were trying to help Roy Dobel out of a swarm of redcoats. That's about all I had time to see, for the next second three of 'em were on me, mauling me and dragging me down. I went down; what use to try to stand up? Not with all that weight on me. I'd rather fight wildcats than Red Runners. For a minute I felt their fists pounding on me and then I got a kick in the ribs from a Red Runner's boot and I rolled into a corner to get out of the way of that pushing and shoving bunch, the noise of whose feet on the floor sounded like the stamping of horses.

I remember hearing shouting outside. I remember even that I thought somebody was yelling "Hawkins," but I couldn't tell for certain; not in that noise and clatter of the fight could you hear anything for certain, but I do know that all at once Harkinson's brass horn rang out again—three blasts it sounded, short and snappy—the signal for alarm, telling the Red Runners to run and live up to their name. Like a drove they stampeded out into the night. Over went the Christmas tree. I hurried out of my corner and yelled for some of the fellows to come and help me with the tree. Some of the candles were still burning and they set fire to the tree. Dick Ferris came and helped me with the tree and we stamped out the fire. It almost ruined the tree, but we shoved it up again in its place, after all the candles were out. I wondered why the others had not come to help, too, but when I turned I saw the reason.

Perry Stokes, Johnny McLarren, and Lew Hunter were sitting on a big, husky Red Runner, who looked like he was sorry he ever came into our clubhouse. Roy Dobel

and Bill Darby had a fellow cornered over under our coat hooks, and Robby Hood and Shadow Loomis had one tangled up in the curtains between the meeting room and my writing office.

"Good-night!" I yelled, "where's Jerry Moore? Did they take him?"

"No, you big boob," came Jerry's voice from under the table, "I got a red boy under here and he's too big for me. Come and help me if you don't want him to get away."

"Halloo!" came a call from the porch. And there, in the door stood the Sheriff and Santa Claus—Doc Waters, I mean, dressed like Santa Claus. Doc was leaning upon the Sheriff and they walked slow. Two other men stood outside; they were the Sheriff's men.

"Merry Christmas, Sheriff," hollered Jerry Moore, poking his head from under the table. "I've got a Christmas gift for you if you'll come and help me git him out."

The Sheriff laughed. I noticed Doc Waters limped as he walked to a chair and sat down.

"We heard 'em, Hawkins," said the Sheriff, "and they heard us 'hallooing' for you; that's what made 'em run, when they heard us coming, but you've got four of 'em, heh? Oh, Judge Granbery will be glad to know this. It's a merry Christmas, ain't it, boys?"

He lined up the four captured Red Runners. We did not find out their names, but I made a note of their numbers on their sleeves; Number 14 was the one Jerry had caught under the table; Number 8, Shadow Loomis and Robby Hood had tied with the door curtains; Number 18, Perry and Johnny and Lew had sat upon; Number 6, Roy Dobel and Bill Darby had cornered under our coat hangers. The Sheriff whistled out

the door and in came his two deputies and they took the Red Runners out.

"They came for me just as I left the clubhouse, Hawkins," said Doc Waters; "they must have known I had that bag o' toys for the Bigstaff kids. They jumped on me like a pack of wolves—I bet you there must have been twenty Red Runners in that gang. No, they didn't hurt me, but they got the bag. I got myself to blame for nearly breaking my leg. I was fool enough to run after 'em, and I went slam-bang over a log; it was all white with snow; you couldn't tell a log from a hole in the ground. The last I saw of 'em they were rowing acrost the river."

"They've got a hiding place on Burney's Field," I said.

"Yeah, I guess so," said Doc, rubbing his bruised leg, "but I picked myself up and dragged my way up to the main road, and there I meets Sheriff, here, and I tell him about it and he brings his two men down here with me. Seems like we come just in time. Sounded like you all were having a hot time when we got near your clubhouse."

We all laughed. Doc and Sheriff laughed, too. We told 'em all about it.

"It's getting late," I said, "the boys will have to get up early to-morrow morning to sing in church. Do you want to hear a song before you go, Doc?"

We sang *Adeste Fideles* again. I saw the Sheriff snatch his hat from his head when he heard us begin. I wondered if it reminded him of Christmas when he was a little boy.

"Holy Smoke!" exclaimed Doc, "there's the bag—my very bag full of toys for Ben Bigstaff's kids—Hawkins, they didn't get it after all."

Sure enough. There, partly hidden under the table, lay the old Santa Claus pack.

"It's too late for you boys to do any more to-night," said Doc, "but the first thing to-morrow morning you bring that pack o' toys to Ben Bigstaff—tell him Santy Claus had an accident."

Which we did.

XXVII

New Year's Eve

"Ring out, wild bells, to the wild sky,
The flying cloud, the frosty light;
The year is dying in the night;
Ring out, wild bells, and let him die."

I READ those words over. Somehow they made me feel sad. Here it was New Year's Eve, and we had gathered for our last meeting of the year in our old clubhouse. On the little square of blackboard on the wall beside the organ, Lew Hunter had chalked the words of the song he wanted us to sing to-night. We had only practised it once, and that was in the afternoon, when Perry Stokes brought down a book of Tennyson's poems, and showed us the piece. Lew Hunter admitted it was a beautiful song to sing, and the only trouble was that it didn't have any music notes to it. But Lew is a born music master; he fished through all his music books, and finally got a piece of music that would go with the words. So we practised it that afternoon. But it takes some fellows longer to memorize words; and so Lew had put the words on the blackboard.

Well, we all took our places, and held a little meeting. It seemed to me as I looked at our Captain that he seemed a little sad. I felt that way, too. I believe we all did. We had a good time in the year that was dying. We were ready to greet the new year with a glad hurrah and a warm hand, but hated like the dickens to let go of the old.

"The last meeting of the year," our Captain was saying: "The last meeting of the year will come to order, fellas. It was a good year, a fine year. We kept out o' trouble, we got away from the Red Runners every time, and one more thing, we got our Seckatary back with us in the year that's about to put on its hat and say good-bye to us."

He turned. They all turned and smiled at me.

"Forget that part," I said; "forget it, Dick."

But before I got those words out of my mouth all of those good old friends of mine were on their feet and shouting "Hurrah!" "Hurrah!" they shouted, three times. And then they sat down together. You can't beat that. No, sir. I'm Seckatary of a bunch of fellows —might be the same kind o' kids you are, might be as good as the best and as bad as the worst, but let me tell you there ain't any better kids in the world—you see how they stick up for me—for their old Seckatary, and I never did anything for them to talk about—no, sir, never in my whole life. But they—

"Perry Stokes will sing," said Dick. "Perry will give the old year the send-off. You boys might not know it, but Perry is a singer in a class by himself. I never knew it myself. But Lew Hunter says he is the best singer he ever knew, and Lew knows what he talks about. When Lew gives the sign we will all join in. Step up, Perry."

Perry Stokes always does what he is told. No matter who tells him, he gets right up and does it. He seems to think because he is overseer of our meeting place every one of us boys is his boss.

He sang that song; that wild-bells song that says good-night to the old year, and tells everybody to let the poor old year die in peace. He sang it, if it ever was

sung. I never will forget how he sang. Perry has a sort of hushy voice; maybe you don't know what I mean, but his voice sounded like he was trying to sing without waking up anybody. Well, and with that hushy voice, he sang that strange verse about the wild bells that ring out in the frosty night. He had us all listening, looking at him, as if we wondered how he could sing that way. And when he sang "The year is dying in the night," he made me feel as if was really happening—and I looked out of the widow into the night, as if I expected to see something of the old year himself shambling off to his grave. I didn't, of course, but I saw—

Yes, I saw something. I saw faces at every window; noses pushed against frosted panes, dim, yellow faces of a dozen Red Runners listening to that song. It came time for us all to join in the singing, and I took my eyes from the windows and sang with the boys. I said nothing at all of what I had seen. But I knew. I knew that the place was surrounded by Red Runners. And New Year's Eve!

After the meeting I asked the boys to stay until the bells and whistles began to greet the new year. But it seemed like all the fellows had something else to do. Roy Dobel had an invitation to a barn dance; Jerry Moore said his folks had company and he had to be home; Bill Darby and Johnny McLarren were going to a party at some girl's house; Dick Ferris said he never liked to hear the whistles and bells, and always went to bed early on this night; Perry Stokes said it was his pop's night off, and, of course, it wasn't more than right that he should be at home.

"Well, Lew," I said, "Only you and me left. I knew I'd have one—"

"Excuse me, Hawkins," said Lew, "but you know I

have to play the chimes to-night—the preacher wants me to be there at quarter to twelve—"

"Good-night," I said, "it's only nine o'clock—"

"Yes, I know, but I've got to see that everything is ready; the bell ropes got to be tested all over and—"

"Go on," I said. "Get out, Lew, you might be too late already."

I sighed as I found myself all alone in my little office in the clubhouse: New Year's Eve! Time to be celebrating. And every one of my gang left me. Fifteen minutes ago those same fellows were shouting "hurrah" for their Seckatary. Here I am alone!

"Ah, well," I said to myself, "they're only kids; they've got to have some good times; it's only a grouchy Seckatary fella like me who—"

But then I suddenly thought of something. What of those pasty faces that had been pressed against the window panes while we were singing? The place was surrounded by Red Runners. And here was I alone—what if Harkinson and Long Tom came and took me up to their headquarters to torture me—to pay me back for what they thought I had been to blame for?

"Hawkins, Hawkins."

It came in a whisper from the outer room. I pushed through the curtains. The meeting room of the clubhouse was dark. Lew had been the last to leave and turned out the light. Two dark forms I could make out in the shadowy room. My heart leaped into my throat. At once I believed it was Harkinson and Long Tom, or Androfski.

"Hawkins," came the whisper again, and I knew it was Shadow, and with him was Robby Hood. "They're here—the whole Red Runner crew—every last one of

'em, surrounding the place. I don't know what's their game, but—"

"Come in here," I ordered. Shadow and Robby came in. Shadow carried under his arm a parcel done up in brown paper. He hurriedly took off his coat and unwrapped the brown parcel. I saw at once that it was the red sweater that Seventh-in-Line Lasky had given us when he cut loose from the Red Runners.

"Shadow!" I cried, "you're not going—"

"Yeah," he broke in, "you guessed it, old Seckatary. I'm going to try to get in their crowd to-night. I'll look just like any other Red Runner, won't I?"

He had slipped on the red sweater with the white number "7" on the sleeve, and turned his cap around so that the peak was in back.

"They'll think Lasky has come back," he said; "they'll never know the difference. I'm bound to follow them and find out their secret headquarters, Hawkins."

"It's risky business, Shadow," I said.

"I'm used to risky business, Hawkins," he said; "that's the kind I like best. This is going to be fun for me."

"But how can you find them?" I asked. "Shadow, if they're scattered all through these woods—"

"Listen!"

Shadow opened the door a trifle and peered out. Over the frosty night air came the sound of Harkinson's horn.

"That's my call," said Shadow Loomis; "now, Hawkins, I'm off. Keep my coat. If I don't come back for it—"

"You'd better come back for it," I shouted to him as he leaped out of the door into the dark. I heard his

feet sink in the snow as he landed. Then he was gone like a shadow.

. . . . . .

Robby Hood and I had a good game of checkers together. In fact, we had several games. We intended to sit up until the wild bells began to ring out to the wild sky that the old year was dying. It must have been nine-thirty when Shadow left. It was about eleven o'clock when we heard a step upon the porch. I knew it was Shadow.

He came in hurriedly.

"I've got it, fellas," he said.

It was snowing. His red sweater was almost white with snow. He started to pull off the old "7" red coat.

"Got what?" I asked.

"This," he said, handing me a sheet.

I unrolled the paper. It was the roll call of the Red Runners, and their numbers. Here it is:

1, Long Tom; 2, Harkinson; 3, Androfski; 4, Oder; 5, Jude; 6, Crosby; 7, Lasky; 8, Fraley; 9, Thrasher; 10, Bushelman; 11, Grenofeld; 12, Fisher; 13, Wolf; 14, Spooring; 15, Katman; 16, Wills; 17, Runge; 18,Thomson.

"Good-night, Shadow," I said, "Judge Granbery will be glad to have this list. It's the whole gang, I guess."

"Yep, every one," replied Shadow. "And where do you think they meet, Robby?"

"Search me," Robby answered.

"You know the old tobacco warehouse—the one the high water always reaches, and chased the tobacco people out of?"

"Not there?"

"Yep—upstairs—they own the whole place. No-

body goes there any more, you know. They've got all the windows covered and everything, and inside—say, boy, you ought to see the fine lamps, the chairs, the carpets on the floors. Why, Hawkins, they've got our clubhouse skinned a mile. They didn't suspicion me once—answered my name every time—Lasky. Asked me where I'd been once, Harkinson did, and I told him home, to see my mother for Christmas. That was the right thing to say, wasn't it?"

"Sure," I said.

"Well, that's what I thought," continued Shadow Loomis; "then they had their regular meeting; they're sore as the dickens at you fellas for catching Crosby, Fraley, Spooring, and Thompson on Christmas Eve. They talked about a plan to help them escape from the Sheriff's jail."

"No chance," I said; "the Sheriff has already sent them to the school where they will have to stay till they learn better manners."

"That's what I thought," said Shadow; "then they had a regular feast, a New Year's Eve feast, but, honest to goodness, Hawkins, I believe they must have stolen all the stuff they had to eat, else where could they have gotten chicken and ham and bread and cake and pie—"

"Sure," said Robby; "stolen. Bakery shops and such is their line. They fixed up for their feast—"

"I didn't dare to stay for that," said Shadow. "I excused myself. I took a chance there. Didn't know if Lasky had been in the habit of excusing himself or not. But I played Lasky's part as I thought he would have played it, and, believe me, I got away with it. The roll call of their gang is on the wall in the hallway just as you go out. I had this paper and my pencil ready. I just copied the list before I snuck out, Hawkins."

AND THEN --- PERRY STOKES'S HUSHY VOICE: "RING OUT THE OLD, RING IN THE NEW," —

"Fine boy, Shadow," I said; "Judge Granbery will give you a reward for this."

"Put it in the treasury box if he does," said Shadow. "I had enough fun out of it for my reward. Believe me, Hawkins, I'm going to try it again, sometime."

"I wish you wouldn't, Shadow," I said; "it's risky business."

"I'm used to risky business, Hawkins," said Shadow, laughing; "dern if I could have any fun if there weren't something risky about it."

"Listen, fellas."

Ah, yes, boys, we listened. How peaceful—how sweet was the sound of those chimes as it swung over the midnight air to us that lonesome New Year's Eve—dear old Lew Hunter's chimes, playing good-bye to the old year that was ticking away its last fifteen minutes. You fellas think we didn't have any feelings—I wish you'd seen how Shadow and Robby snatched off their caps and bowed their heads, as the soft notes of those steeple bells brought "Lead, Kindly Light," across the frosty, crisp air to us. "Throw open that door," I shouted, and Shadow stepped up to open the door so that the sound could come clearer. "Lead, Kindly Light, Amid the n'circling Gloom—"

Yeah! We followed the sound, with the words in our mind. Lead, kindly little light of luck, of right, of good, of whatever you want to think it is; but lead us again, as you did in the year just passed, through trouble, through sorrow, through care—"

"What's that?"

It was Robby who spoke. Around the side of the clubhouse footsteps slushing through the snow—the sound you could never mistake. And then—and then—Perry Stoke's hushy voice:

"Ring out the old, ring in the new,
Ring happy bells across the snow;
The year is going, let him go;
Ring out the false, ring in the true."

And the next minute they had all leaped on the porch—would you believe that a bunch of fellas would think that much of you, that they would play all night long, and, then, when the hour of the new year comes, they would be right there with you? But there they were—every one but Lew Hunter, and his place was filled by the sound of those chimes that he was playing for us, the soft-toned bells that sent a kindly song to us from the church steeple.

Quickly they came in—we had much to tell them. Shadow repeated what he had seen and heard in the Red Runners' headquarters, and they all sat and wondered until he had finished. When he had done so, the chimes had stopped.

"Happy New Year, fellas," I yelled, "it's after twelve—"

"And time to be going," said Robby; "come, Shadow, that old engine might not work—"

But the engine did work, and we waited there on the river bank until we saw their little launch disappear around the upper bend. Then—

"Come on, fellas," I said, "to-morrow we will have our first meeting in the new year. It's time for us all to get some sleep."

Which we did.

XXVIII

A Rolling Stone

ONE afternoon after school, we had held our meeting, and all of us boys were amusing ourselves in the clubhouse playing checkers and drawing on the blackboard, Lew Hunter, playing the organ, and some fellows singing, and just having a quiet, good time, because it was too cold to go out. Jerry Moore had the stove roaring, and it was fine and warm in the little clubhouse. It had been snowing all day and the ground was covered almost knee deep. I was sitting in my little office behind the meeting room, writing the minutes of the meeting, when I heard the door opened and Bill Darby's voice say, "Yes, he belongs to our club, but he ain't here now."

I got up and walked into the meeting room.

"Tell him to come in, Bill," said Dick Ferris.

A young fellow entered, a ragged-looking somebody, older than any of us boys, but yet he was only a boy. He wore only a ragged felt hat, a blue shirt, a thin, worn coat and a pair of long, torn trousers.

"You say he does come down here sometimes?" he asked, turning to Bill Darby.

"Yes, sometimes. Here, Hawkins, you better talk to him. He's asking about Shadow."

"My name's Loomis," he said, looking at me. "I thought maybe I'd see Shadow here—fellas down the river said they saw him with you boys sometimes."

"Yes," I said, "he may come down to-day, but I hardly think he will, because the snow's so deep. If it ain't personal—"

"He's my brother," said the ragged stranger; "I

ain't been home the last few years; I ain't never had much use for home; but sometimes I git a notion in my head that I want to see that kid brother o' mine—he's a nice kid, Shadow is, ain't he?"

"We think so," I answered. "Maybe you would like to sit at the stove and get warm? Shadow might come. I wish you would stay. I know he wants to see you."

"How do you know that?" he asked.

"Oh, because," I answered, "if I had a big brother like you, I'd want to take a look at him once in a while—even if—"

"Go on," said the ragged one; "go on, say it. You might as well knock me, too. Most everybody does. Nobody's said a word much for me, except maybe Shadow. That's why I ran away from home."

"Ah!" I said, "so that's how it came about, eh? Well, I hope Shadow comes."

Then no more was said. The stranger seated himself by the stove to get warm and the boys went on with their pastimes, while I went back to my writing.

Shadow did not come that afternoon.

One by one the boys left for home. At last I was left alone with the ragged one.

"Well," I said, "I must be going. I hope you will make yourself at home. You'll have to hike out and dig up some firewood if you want to keep warm, though. We don't keep very much on hand. You'll be able to find some down on the bank."

"Nothin' but snow down there now," he said; "but I'm used to the cold. I don't seem to mind it much any more. If you boys don't mind I'll thank you for lettin' me stay in this little shack. It beats sleeping out in the snow."

"You mean you want to sleep in here all night?" I asked.

"That is, if you boys don't mind," he said.

I walked up close to him and looked into his face.

"Listen," I said, "are you sure you are Shadow Loomis's brother?"

"I ain't never told a lie yet, boy," he replied with a steady look at me; "I guess they don't think much o' me back there, but listen, I ain't forgot that my father was an honest man, and truthful. And in them respecks, I live up to the old man—that much I saved out o' myself."

I nodded my head and turned to go.

"All right, Loomis," I said, "the place is yours."

And then I went out. For I had seen something in his eyes that looked so much like Shadow Loomis, that I knew he was not lying to me then.

And he slept there that night.

. . . . . .

The next day when I came down to the clubhouse, I could see that our visitor had gone out. His footprints were the only ones in the new-fallen snow, and they led away from the porch steps.

"Fine," I said to myself, "I hope he's gone."

But no such good luck. Before we had our meeting over, he came in, with a bag of buns in his arm. He saw that we were holding a meeting. I don't know whether he knew it was a meeting, but he saw that we were talking about something, so he just slipped sidewise over to the stove, sat down and stuck his feet upon the fender, and with his back toward us, began to eat his sugar rolls.

The river had frozen over and our boys had brought

down their skates. So it was that after the meeting was over, I was left alone with the ragged brother of Shadow Loomis.

"Well, Loomis," I said, "seems like you might have a long wait. Shadow hasn't shown up yet."

"You think he will come some time?"

"Oh, sure," I said, "but this ice in the river might keep him away. He ain't strong on footwork, and it is a pretty walk from Watertown down here. If the river was running, he'd most likely come down in Robby Hood's launch—"

"Robby—has he got a launch?"

"You know Robby, too, then?"

"Best fella I ever met. But where did he git enough money to buy a launch?"

I explained that Robby's launch was a homemade one; a skiff with a motor attached. My raggedy companion chuckled to himself.

"That's Robby, the little smart ellick," he said, "always fixin' up things outa nothing."

Then he turned to me suddenly and said:

"Say, are you the guy they calls Seckatary Hawkins?"

"That's me," I answered. "Who told you?"

"I met a guy," he said, "a guy what didn't have any money—he was going home, and he wanted to see his mother before Christmas. He asked me for a loan. I only had two bits, and I give it to him. He says to me, 'Listen, bo, if you ever need a friend, go into a house that looks like a little dump on a river bank not far up the creek, and ask for a guy they calls Seckatary Hawkins. He'll help you out,' says he, 'and he'll give you some—' "

"Wait a minute," I interrupted, "who was this guy you met?"

"He did tell me his name, but I done forgot it. Maybe if you could—"

"Was it Lasky?"

His face lit up with a smile.

"That's him," he said, "Lasky, and he told me—"

"Oh, never mind," I said, "never mind what he told you. I know. Seems like a fella can't do anything without somebody else getting on to it—"

"Listen here, Seckatary Hawkins," spoke up my raggedy boarder, "I ain't askin—"

"I know," I said, "I know."

The door opened. Shadow Loomis stood there. He did not see my raggedy friend, because I sat in front of him, and from the door he could not be seen.

"Seck," he says (Shadow had got a habit of calling me "Seck" lately.) "Seck, if you'll step outside, please, you'll see the latest invention of your honorable friend Robby Hood and yours truly, a regular twin-six ice skooter that'll take the wind at forty-five miles an hour, providin' the ice holds—"

Suddenly he stopped. Just that quick he stopped, for I had stood up and stepped aside and his eyes fell on the raggedy visitor stretched out on the chair with his feet on top of the stove.

"Hi, Shadow?"

"Hello, you big bum," said Shadow, and there was a scowl on his face. "Where on earth did you come from?"

He walked over quickly to where my visitor boarder sat. The latter took his feet down hurriedly, and stood up to meet Shadow.

"Hello, brother," he said; his voice was much lower.

"Fine brother you are, ain't you?" remarked Shadow. "What you doing here? Why do you always try to follow

"HELLO, BROTHER," HE SAID;
HIS VOICE MUCH LOWER.

me up and make me ashamed that I got a brother like you? Ain't I got a right to be let alone, John?"

"Shadow," said the other in a low tone, "I ain't come to shame you, kid. Listen, I ain't had a thought—never in my life—of doing that. I ain't caring about the folks back home—I won't go there, Shadow, 'cause I know they don't want to see me. I knew they wouldn't want to see me, but I thought sure you would be glad to see me, kid."

Shadow straightened up, and his eyes sparkled fire.

"Well, I ain't," he said; "you ain't got no right to come here, John. I'm thought well of by this bunch of boys, and I like 'em. I don't want you to queer me, see?"

Shadow came over to where I stood, and looked out of the window. His dirty brother stood with his arms hanging in a helpless attitude by the stove, as if he wanted to say something—

"Oh, all right, Shadow," he said: "I didn't think. I guess I can skip out without doing you much trouble—"

"The trouble's done," spoke Shadow sharply, turning suddenly upon his older brother, "you've probably told all the other boys that you were my brother. What'll they think of me now, huh? Fine brother you make for a fella."

I wish I could have said something, but at the time, nothing came to my mind that would have done any good. I watched Shadow as he turned his vexed face again to the window, and I also saw the pain in the face of his raggedy, no-account brother.

"You can tell 'em," said the ragged brother, "you can tell 'em, Shadow, that I was a liar if you want to—tell 'em it ain't so, tell 'em I ain't your brother, and never was. I don't want to spoil anything for you, kid. Gee

wiz, you always been the happiest thing I had to think about, out there on them cold nights alone, when I didn't have anything to eat for five or six days, and when the snow was coming down. I always thought about you, kid; yeah, 'member how I used to call you 'the kid'? Them was the happy days, wasn't they, Shadow? Gosh, if you wasn't the finest little kid brother I ever knew. And then we had to go and grow up; and me, I come to be a bum, but you—you stayed right. I always knew you would make a fine boy, Shadow. That's why I had to come back—dern if I didn't—you know those Christmas days we just had?—they made me think about it so much—they felt like they was squeezin' my throat, and tellin' me to go back and take another look at you, kid."

He stopped his long speech, but neither Shadow nor I moved. As for me, I could not. Something in that raggedy boy's talk had "squeezed my throat," as he put it. I could not believe that Shadow Loomis could be so hard-hearted to this poor brother of his. For I was certain it was his brother—as certain as I was that my name was Hawkins.

The slam of the door brought us both around at once. We were alone, Shadow and I.

"Hawkins," he said, "I hope you will forget this."

"I hope I won't," I said; "I don't want to forget it, Shadow. That boy is your brother. I wish I had one, Shadow. I ain't got a brother, but if I had, kid, I wouldn't care if he was just like your John. Gosh, Shadow, you don't know how lucky you are to have a brother. I think he's the finest fella—"

"Shut up," said Shadow shortly, "you and him make me sick."

"All right," I said, "but he's your brother, Shadow.

He's not so smart as you; any blind man could see that. But he means well. Any kind of a brother is worth having, and I wish—"

"I wish he were your brother," broke in Shadow.

"So do I," I said, "I'd give him a glad smile, anyway, and tell him there's happier days ahead for him. I wish I could trade you something for him, Shadow, but everything I own wouldn't be worth—"

"Aw, dry up!" shouted Shadow, and out into the snow he went, leaving me there alone.

. . . . . .

That night the Red Runners came. Angered by our success in capturing their numbers 6, 8, 14, and 18, they had been watching our clubhouse every night for a chance to tackle us. And this night it so happened that only Bill Darby, Shadow Loomis, Robby Hood, Dick Ferris, Lew Hunter, and myself were there. It was their chance. They made the attack while we were sitting quietly around, talking about the snow fort we would build on the morrow. The door burst open as if a whirlwind had struck it, and we found ourselves held by Red Runners.

Now, how do you think we were saved? Sure, Loomis's raggedy, no-account brother John. Yeah, he saved us that night. He stood in the doorway a minute after we were captured. He carried a good stick, nothing else.

"Do these red birds belong to your crowd, Seckatary Hawkins?" he called, looking over the heads of all those present.

"No!" I yelled, "not one of 'em. They don't belong here, John."

"All right, then," he sang out, and, swinging his stick over his head, he made for the first one, which

happened to be Long Tom himself. With a yell Long Tom sprang for the door. Shadow's raggedy brother let him pass, and as he did so the second one, whom I knew to be Harkinson, in spite of the wide-brim hat that hid half of his face, shot past him, and the next second there came the sound of the horn—the call of the leader to his Red Runners, and they all obeyed that call and followed out the door. We were alone, safe.

. . . . . .

"He's just a rolling stone," said Shadow to me, "and he'll never amount to anything. That's why I won't have anything to do with him."

"Yeah, but Shadow, he's a rollin' stone, just a-rollin' home, and you better help him roll along to where he belongs. I bet you there were days when he did you many a good turn, Shadow."

Shadow's eyes were turned to the floor.

"Well, yes," he said, "he did do me some good turns —by Jove, Hawkins, there was a time when—"

"Never mind telling me," I said. "Tell your brother John about it."

He did. Yeah. Him and John had a long talk before Robby and Shadow left.

"If you're going to sleep here all night, John," I said to the raggedy one, "we might as well leave the key with you."

Which we did.

XXIX

The Trap that Didn't Work

THE Rolling Stone slept in our clubhouse again that night. He pulled all the small rugs from the meeting room into my little writing office and made himself a bed on the floor beside my little desk. When we came down to hold our meeting, after school, he was out, but he came in before the meeting was over. He didn't pay any attention to us; just mosied over to a chair by the stove, put a few more sticks in the fire and then sat there with his feet propped up on the fender. Nobody said a word to him; nor did he offer any word to us. Shadow Loomis and Robby Hood had not come down; so there was no meeting that day between the Rolling Stone and his more-refined brother.

The reason I had not turned over the list of Red Runners' names to Judge Granbery was that Shadow had begged me to hold it until he had just one more try at it himself. He was very keen on capturing the Runners without the help of the Sheriff and his men. So I had shoved that roll call of names into my desk the night Shadow brought it to me, and there it stayed. A few days after our last fight with the Runners I got a note from Shadow.

"To-night we will make the try," he wrote, "and then if we don't make good, you can turn the list over to old Judge Granbery. Robby will be waiting for you at the steamboat landing. He will show you the place. I will be inside the Red Runners' headquarters. I will open the front door when I hear your knock. They

never use that door, but I'll be on the inside. Bring all the boys."

So that night we all met on the main road and started walking for Watertown. When a machine came along, going the way we were headed, I called. It was a small machine, closed in with curtains. It stopped, and a face looked out at us—by jingo, it was good old Doc Waters.

"Wait a minute, Doc," I said, "you got to take us boys along."

"Where you boys going?" he asked.

"Watertown, to see a picture show," I said; "you got plenty room for us."

"All right, jump in," he said. We all piled in—good night! what a tight fit it was for me to squeeze in after all those other boys were in. But I got in all right. Another man sat in the front seat with Doc. I was surprised to see it was the Sheriff.

"Say," I began, "did Shadow Loomis tell you—"

"Tell me what?" asked Doc.

"Oh, never mind," I said, "only it seems funny that you and the Sheriff happen to be going to Watertown just when we boys are bound for there."

"I don't see anything funny about it," said Doc, and he stepped on the gas and away we went.

Lew Hunter started up a song, and while we sang I noticed that the Sheriff and Doc were talking very earnestly together, but I could not overhear what they said. We arrived at Watertown in less than half an hour, and Doc stopped right in front of the steamboat landing.

"How'd you know we wanted to get out here, Doc?" I asked.

"Wherever you say, Hawkins, old boy," said Doc with a laugh, "and if you want to ride back with me,

I'll be waiting here for you when you're ready to go home."

"All right, come on, fellas," I said. We piled out. Doc waved at us and then we waited till the car disappeared up the little street that led away from the landing. As we turned a dark figure came from behind the shadows of the steamboats at the wharf. It was Robby Hood.

"This way, fellas," he whispered; "Come on, follow me, and be careful. Get in line everybody and don't make a sound."

When I come to think of it, that was a very foolish thing for us boys to be doing—going straight into the nest of the Red Runners, thinking we were going to capture them that easy. But it was Shadow Loomis who had given us the nerve to do it. Shadow made me believe he had it all fixed; that he would do everything to trap the Runners, and all we would have to do would be to come and take them to the Sheriff. If it hadn't been for the lucky way—but wait, I'll tell you just how it happened.

It's a gloomy, mean-looking place—that Red Runners' headquarters. That dingy little street—more like an alley, I think—dark, except for two street lamps that threw very little light, and rows of ramshackle buildings, pasted over with steamboat notices and circus bills and theater advertisements; it made me wish we had not come. But Robby had led us past the two lamp-posts, and we stood before a door—a wooden door of a warehouse, on which a "For Rent" sign had been pasted a long time ago, and was half peeled off now.

"Now," whispered Robby, as we all gathered around him. "When I give the signal the door will open, and Shadow will be there. He will lead the way and tell

us what to do. Nobody must speak, and, above all, watch your step so you don't stumble against something in the dark. All ready? Here goes, then."

Robby turned to the door and gently tapped it with his knuckles.

"Tap—Tap—Tap-tap-tap—"

And then we waited for the door to open. But it did not open. For a few minutes we waited. Robby tapped again. Still no answer. No sound came from behind the door.

"'S funny," muttered Robby; "it's the time he told me to be here. I'll try again."

He tapped once more. We waited again a few minutes. Still nothing happened. I know some of the boys thought Robby was trying to kid us.

"By Jove, Hawkins, they've got him—I bet you a dollar he was caught—else he'd be here to open this door as he promised."

I had thought of that, too. I turned to our Captain, Dick Ferris.

"Take the boys back, Dick, to the place where Doc Waters said he would meet us and wait till Doc comes. If we don't join you in a short time tell Doc we went in this place."

We watched them trot away, pass the two lamp-posts, and turn the corner. Then Robby said to me:

"There's only one way—Shadow showed it to me himself. Will you take a chance?"

"For Shadow, sure. I want to find him, Robby, to know he is safe, before I go home."

"Come on, then; it's over the housetops. You don't mind that, do you?"

"I don't mind anything now. Lead the way, Robby, old boy."

He dodged around and got ahead of me. I followed like a cat. Two doors down there opened up a small passageway between two houses. Into this he ducked. I at his heels. The old building was empty and dark. He leaped into a doorway which no longer had a door; up a flight of steps; and started up another flight. I stood with him at last on the third floor. He waited only till I arrived, then stepped out of an open window. When I followed I found we were on the roof of a building. From the river a glow from the wharf lamps threw a screen of light on the river mist; outlined against this I could see the ragged line of roofs and chimney pots—

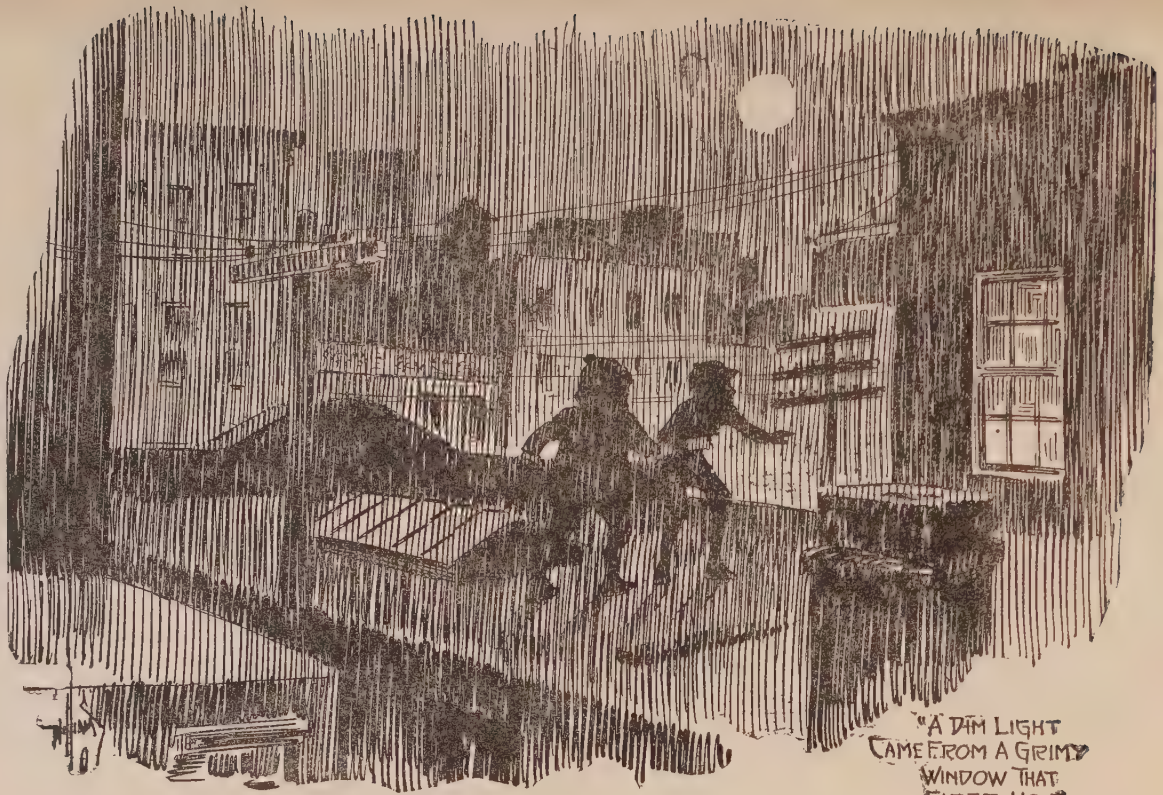
"Come on, Hawkins," Robby's voice came from ahead in the dark; "watch your step."

I lighted my way with my electric flash. Once we had to make a pretty big jump from one roof to another. I didn't dare to think how far down the street lay. We got across it safe. Then into another window, down one flight of steps and out onto another housetop.

"See," said Robby, pointing, "that's where we get in."

A dim light came from a grimy window that faced us across the housetop. The building next to us was one floor higher, and it's only window opened onto the roof we stood on. We could not see through the window panes, so thick were they with dust and grime. I doubt if the light could have been seen from the street below. Robby lifted the window; it made an awful scraping, squeaking sound. He stepped over the window sill and motioned me to follow him.

We stood in a bare little hallway. A narrow stairway led down. At the head of the stairs was an empty box, on which stood a lantern. We started to go down the



"A DIM LIGHT CAME FROM A GRIMY WINDOW THAT FACED US."

steps. As we did so we heard a muffled sound. I turned, and over against the wall, tied to a plain back chair, a rag tied across his mouth, was Shadow Loomis.

I smothered the cry of surprise that came to my lips when I saw him. Robby had seen him as quickly, and together we rushed to him and in a little while had him free.

"Thanks, fellas," he whispered, "don't talk. Long Tom and Number Thirteen tied me up—caught me just as I was coming. They're suspicious of this window. Good you didn't come sooner. They were watching it all evening, Long Tom and Thirteen. But the rest of the gang came back a while ago. They're holding a meeting downstairs now. Harkinson's in bad with Long Tom, or something like that. Be awfully careful and tiptoe after me."

You can't imagine how excited I was as we followed Shadow down those narrow stairs. A door stood open about an inch or two, and we tiptoed over and peeped in. I never will forget how my heart thumped against my chest when I looked for the first time into the meeting place of the Red Runners. It used to be an old tobacco warehouse, but on account of the high water coming into it at times it was no longer used. Two or three old tobacco hogsheads still stood in corners, and here and there lay small piles of tobacco leaf. The Red Runners were sitting around a long table made of long boards on top of empty packing cases. A fancy oil lamp stood on it at each end. At one end sat Long Tom, and at the other, facing him, sat Harkinson, while the other Red Runners sat on the sides. The one thing that struck me most was that Harkinson wore a pair of dark spectacles, with turtle-shell rims. "Ah," I said to myself, "his pals can't stand those hypnotizing eyes of his any

longer. They are making him wear glasses now to hide his eyes while he is with them." I could not hear what was being said at the table, the room was so big, and the table stood at the other end. But I knew at once there was a quarrel going on. Long Tom stood up and shook his fist at Harkinson. I saw a Red Runner at Harkinson's right stand up. By his beak-shaped nose I knew him to be Androfski the Silent. His lips moved. They were all watching him. Then the Red Runner on Harkinson's left—he was Number Five—stood up, and, in a voice that rang clear to us shouted: "We will stick to Harkinson—Androfski and me."

Three other redcoats from different parts of the crowd jumped up and ran over to Harkinson's place.

"We stand by Harkinson," they shouted.

Long Tom jumped up again. He spoke, and his voice was sharp, but I could not make out the words. Harkinson listened until he had finished; then, without making a reply, he got up and, walking between Androfski and Number Five, left the table, followed by the other three who said they would stand by him. Harkinson seemed to lean on Androfski's arm. They came straight toward the door where we stood. Shadow pushed us back into the dark behind the door. It was good he did, for when the six Red Runners came out they pushed it wide, and we were completely hidden behind it. The six redcoats went down the narrow stairs. I knew it led to the front door—the door by which Shadow had intended to let us in.

When their footsteps could no longer be heard on the stairs, we moved back to the crack of the door. As we did so there came the muffled sound of Harkinson's horn —three blasts, short and snappy—it was the signal that meant to the Red Runner's "Danger is near."

We saw the Red Runners leap up from their seats at the table. "Sit tight," yelled Long Tom, "it's only Harkinson trying to frighten us—we should have taken that horn away from him before he got—"

But none of those Red Runners listened to Long Tom. For the sound of the horn had hardly died away when there came other sounds, the sounds of many feet stamping hurriedly up the narrow stair. I heard Jerry Moore's voice and ran to the rail and looked over. All of our fellows were coming. Doc Waters and the Sheriff were coming with them. I turned to look again into the meeting room. The Red Runners were all running out of a little door in the corner at the farther end of the building—only Long Tom stood by his place, waiting to see whether or not it was a trick that Harkinson was playing.

"Get Long Tom, Robby," cried Shadow. "Hawkins, don't let him go—the others have got away."

We three rushed into that meeting room as our boys reached the top step. But Long Tom was now satisfied that it was not a trick. He turned and ran out of the door in the corner. We rushed after him, but as we pulled the door wide we knew that he had escaped us. There was another stairway. Down we flew, all of the boys and Doc and the Sheriff behind us.

We stood in a little place that was once used for a scales room. Some boards had been pulled up from the floor. I could hear the wash of water, and as I turned my flashlight into the hole I saw a few skiffs floating on the water under the floor.

"That's how they entered this place from the river," said Shadow. "This is high-water time and they can bring their boats right under the floor."

But Long Tom was gone. All the Red Runners were gone. We had not caught a single one.

. . . . . .

We sat there at the table of the Red Runners and Doc Waters and the Sheriff laughed at us. "If you fellas are ready to go back home," said Doc, "come on before my machine is froze up." The other boys were not ready yet, however. They had to take a look at the place, and at the rugs and lamps and things the Red Runners had in their headquarters.

"Say, Doc," I said as we sat alone at one end of the table, "how did you find out?"

"How do you know I found out?" asked Doc, with a serious face.

"Oh, you knew we were coming here to-night—you didn't meet us just by accident—you brought the Sheriff along to see that we wouldn't get hurt. I figured that out right away."

Doc grinned at me. "Same old Hawkins," he said. "No matter where you are, in Cuba, or on a plain river bank, or in Watertown, you never change much. You always figure things out."

"Yeah," I said, "but I can't figure out how you got word that we were coming here to-night—"

"Well, Seckatary," he said, "I happened to drop in the clubhouse to see you this afternoon, but you had already gone, and I found this on the table. You forgot it; you must not be so careless about such things, Hawkins."

He reached in his pocket and handed me a slip of paper. I knew it at once; it was the note Shadow had sent me.

"I hope you won't blame me for reading it, Hawkins,"

said Doc. "I always aim to take care of you boys, you know."

I gripped his hand. "You're a prince, Doc," I said.

Shadow Loomis came up to me to say good-night just before we started to get in Doc's automobile. "Hawkins," he said, "I guess we might as well turn over the Red Runners' list to the Judge to-morrow."

Which we did.

XXX

Harkinson's Last Visit

A FEW days passed in peace. Our meetings were held every day after school without anything unusual about them; it was freezing weather, and the snow lay white and cold with an icy crust upon it; the river was frozen over from bank to bank. Shadow Loomis and Robby Hood had not shown up for many days, and still Rolling Stone John used our clubhouse for a hotel. None of the boys kicked about that. I don't know whether it was because he was Shadow's brother or whether it was because they like John Loomis himself; but anyway they let him alone. The boys would all speak to him as they came in, and he would answer them usually with just one word, "Howdy." Then he would mind his own business and our boys would go about theirs.

Now, on Thursday afternoon, just after our meeting, I stayed inside, while the other boys went out to skate. While I stood by the front window watching the fellows cutting fancy figures on the frozen river my gaze happened to wander over toward Pelham, and I was surprised to see a group of Pelham fellows coming across the ice. "Fine," I said to myself, "Pelham is going to pay us a visit." I had not seen or heard from Briggen and his gang for so long that I was almost about to forget them.

I settled myself in my chair at my desk and waited for the knock on the door. It came. And when I called "Come in," the door opened quickly, and Briggen entered, followed by Dave Burns and Ham Gardner.

"Hawkins," began Briggen, "it's up to us boys to 'tend to those Red Runners. It's about time we stopped their foolishness."

"You've got my permission to go ahead, Briggen," I answered; "what's going to stop you?"

"Come on," said Briggen peevishly, "you know what I mean. You fellas and us fellas together must stop 'em. Separate, we can't do nothin'. We all got to work together."

"We have been working for a long time," I said; "we are not worried, Briggen."

"Yeah, but now it's different. Used to be when they only came down here once in a while, and most times they was after you guys, not us. But now its different, Hawkins. They're too near us Pelham folks to be pleasing."

"You mean—"

"I mean," said Briggen, "that Harkinson has split with Long Tom. I knew it all along, Hawkins. They can't be two leaders to any gang like that, and you know it. You know Long Tom was boss after Stoner, and you know Harkinson has a way of bein' boss hisself."

"Ah," I said, "Harkinson has broken away from Long Tom, eh, Briggen? Is that what you mean, Briggen? Harkinson has set up a gang of his own?"

"You got it," said Briggen; "and the worst of it is that Harkinson has set up his headquarters in this neighborhood—too close to us Pelhams, I tell ya, Hawkins. It can't be allowed. He's set hisself a headquarters over in Burney's Field. He's got a good lot of redcoats with him; they's a lot that didn't care for Long Tom. And they dug 'emselves out a neat cave in the ground, you'd never find it, but ask Ham here—"

"Cross my heart, and double cross it," broke in

Ham Gardner in a low voice; "they've done all that. Briggen is right. It was me as found it, Hawkins. I seen Harkinson's spooky eyes—they got me buffaloed; everytime I see 'em I feel like—"

"I know, Ham," I said; "I've met Harkinson, and looked into those hypnotizing peepers of his. You shouldn't let this thing frighten you as it does. Boys, I thank you for bringing me the news. If we can help you out at any time call on us. We are with you for putting an end to the Red Runners."

"I say, Hawkins," broke in Dave Burns, "aren't they the slickest bunch you ever saw, though? I'll be jugged if I ever saw—"

"Remember Stoner's boy, Dave," I said; "the Red Runners have nothing on him. They're not half as clever. We will put them down and out for the count before long. We might need you boys to help us, though. Go back and take my advice, fellas; stay away from Burney's Field."

"You don't have to tell me," said Ham Gardner.

And they left the clubhouse just as the Rolling Stone came back from a walk through the woods. He was eating an apple and carried another.

"Who's them birds?" he asked, jerking his thumb toward the Pelhams.

"Oh, those boys?" I said, "they are our neighbors across the river."

He grunted something and went to his place beside the stove. I went to work writing down the day's doings in my book.

. . . . . .

I stayed down at the clubhouse longer than ususal that evening. I heard all the other fellows shouting

"So long," as they ran up the river path with their skates rattling on a strap. I had got a late start writing and I wanted to finish up, because Lew Hunter was not coming down to the clubhouse in the evening, and when he didn't come I didn't either. I like Lew's music and singing practice; if there isn't any singing, I'd just as soon stay home. So there I was alone in my office, with only Rolling Stone Loomis out in the front room by the stove.

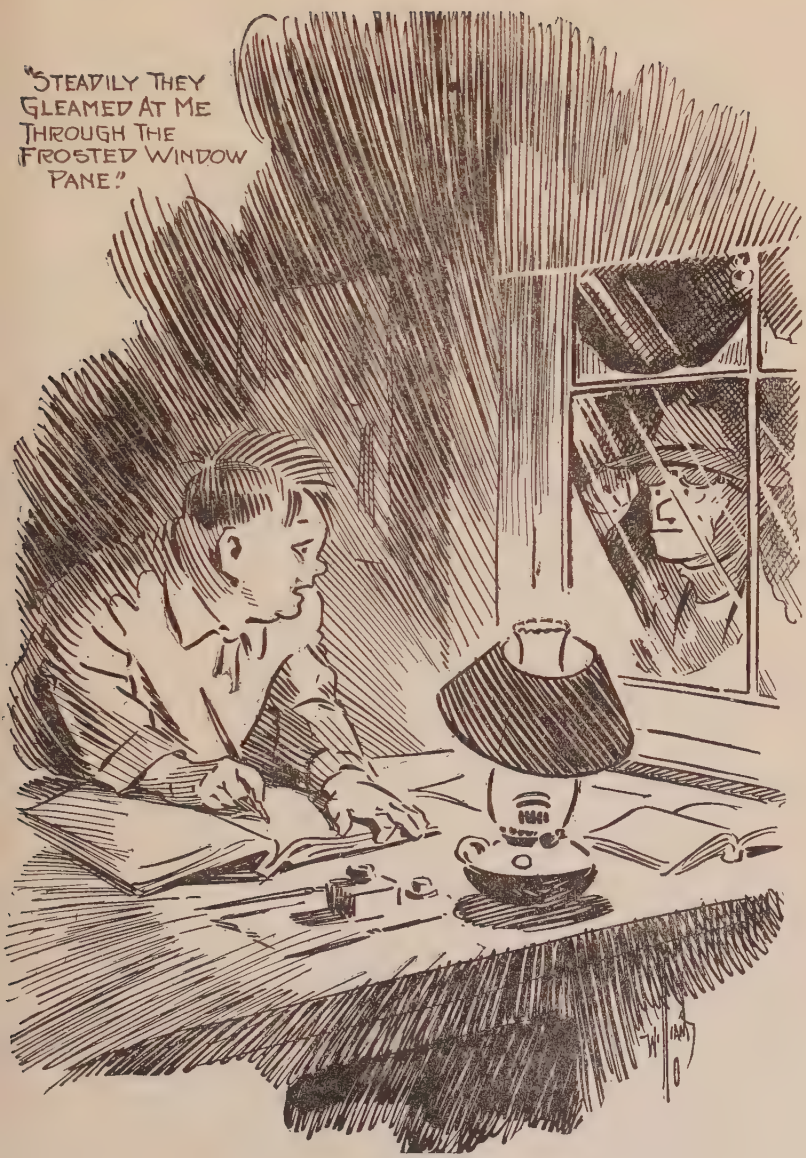
Once I looked out of my window. I seemed to think something had flashed past the window pane. But I saw nothing. I noticed that it had become dark outside, which I had not noticed before because I had had my lamp lit since meeting time. I went again to my writing; once again I turned my eyes to the window at my left. Surely something had been at that pane of glass. Else why had my attention been drawn that way—

Ah! There it was! I knew the reason now. Harkinson's steely eyes—they were not drawn away this time; steadily they gleamed at me through the frosted window pane; then it seemed as if the steely glitter died out of those eyes. Harkinson had lowered a pair of dark-colored spectacles that he had raised while he looked at me. For a moment those dark goggles remained there; then the face disappeared.

"Good Lord!" I heard. And I turned and saw Rolling Stone Loomis standing behind me. "Did you see that, Hawkins? Did you see those eyes? Never in my life did I ever see such eyes look into mine—"

"Excuse me!"

A harsh, rasping sound came from the front room. I felt the draft from the open door. There stood Harkinson—my old-time enemy, my old hypnotizer himself, in my clubhouse and behind him, holding him by the


"STEADILY THEY GLEAMED AT ME THROUGH THE FROSTED WINDOW PANE."

arm, was another Red Runner, who wore the Number 5 on his sleeve.

"Excuse me," repeated Harkinson, in that harsh, rasping voice, a voice I had never heard before; either Harkinson had suffered a change in his voice, or this was not Harkinson. But I looked again, and I knew it was he; it was Harkinson, yeah, with his new spectacles that made him look like an owl—I even thought I could see that steely glitter behind those dark glasses. "I come peaceful, Seckatary Hawkins," he said; "I come to talk things over with you in peace. Under the white flag, under a truce, Hawkins—"

"Yeah," I broke in, "say what you got to say, Harkinson. Don't try any your tricks—"

"No tricks," he cried, and his voice was more rusty than before; "no tricks, as I am a Christian, Hawkins, I give you my word. Sit down and we will talk."

I shoved two chairs out to him and his No. 5. They sat facing me. Rolling Stone Loomis stood behind my chair.

"I broke away, Hawkins," said Harkinson; "I broke away from the Red Runners—"

"How come?" I interrupted; "you still wear the red sweater with your No. 2 on your sleeve; and your pal has No. 5—"

"Gi'me time, gi'me time," cried Harkinson, "hear me out, will you, Hawkins? We broke away, six of us. We ain't with Long Tom no more, see? We cut loose, like Lasky did, Hawkins. You know Lasky. We heard what you did with Lasky. I come to you now to say that we ain't gonna have no more to do with Long Tom nor the Red Runners. The Sheriff is after me, it's me he wants, Hawkins; more'n the other five that's with me. We thought we was safe when we dug in over there

on Burney's Field; but those Pelham boys told—they came to-day—never mind how we found out. But I come peaceful, Hawkins; I won't take revenge on Pelham; and I won't bother you fellas no more, you can bet on that; I'll never bother nobody no more. I ain't what I used to be, Hawkins. I've been unlucky. I got to be let alone till I can get somewhere; I got to take a rest. Androfski has gone to fix things for me, and when he comes back to fetch me, I will go away and never come back. Everything will be all right, if the Sheriff doesn't know that I—if you will tell me you won't tip us off, tell me you won't put the Sheriff wise till I can get away. I'll make a bargain with you, Hawkins—"

"I can't bargain with you, Harkinson," I said; for I could not understand what the old hypnotizer was driving at. "There's no use to go farther." I said. "I'll tell you one thing which is only fair and square. I'll not say a thing about you coming over here to-night. That's all. Further than that, you and your pals will have to take care of yourselves. It doesn't matter to me whether you've broken off with Long Tom or not. That's your business. But none of us fellas will forget the things you've done to us. That's all. Now, git, while the gittin's good."

Both Harkinson and his No. 5 rose at once.

"All right," croaked Harkinson's harsh voice; "all right—"

Oh, boy! How those steely eyes glared at me then. He had backed away and raised his dark spectacles for a moment. I moved back a step or two, and bumped into the Rolling Stone, who seemed to have been petrified by the look of Harkinson's eyes.

"You're gonna be sorry, Hawkins," he said; "there'll

come a day when you will feel sorry—you had a chance—"

"Git out," I said, stepping up closer to the bully, "git out before I throw you out."

He turned on me, his eyes flashing through those dark glasses, and for a second I thought he would smash me to the floor for saying that. But suddenly I saw the light go out of his eyes—yeah, I saw the steely light go out of Harkinson's eyes, and I felt as though I would never be afraid of the hypnotizer again. He stared over my head as though he were listening. His pal stood holding the door open waiting for him. "Come on," he called impatiently. And Harkinson, without another word, turned to go. The funny part of it was that while No. 5 waited at the open door for him, Harkinson steered for the window on the left. Number Five jumped and grabbed his arm and pulled him out the door. That's the way they went out together, arm in arm, and the door slammed behind them.

I ran to the window on the left, Rolling Stone Loomis sprang to the one at the right. We watched the two Runners go down the steps into the ice-crusted snow. I saw No. 5 slip and fall. Harkinson, by himself, walked steadily forward, and I saw him bump smack up against a tree. Then No. 5 was on his feet again, and caught up with Harkinson. Locking his arm in that of the hypnotizer, he hurried him along, and the shadows of the river bank hid them from our view.

We turned back, and I saw the Rolling Stone wipe the perspiration from his forehead.

"You're not warm?" I said.

"Warm as I ever want to be," he said; "whew! never did I see eyes like that fellow had."

"Scared you, did he, John?"

"Scared me stiff, if I ever was," replied the Rolling Stone.

"Well, John," I said, "you've been face to face with one of the strangest boys you'll ever know in your whole life. He was second-in-line in the Red Runners, and he has had more to do with that bunch of red birds, as you call 'em, than even Long Tom himself. He has hypnotizing eyes, Harkinson has—"

"I know it," broke in the Rolling Stone, "don't tell me, Seckatary Hawkins; good Lord, I felt weak as a cat while he sat there. What's that makes a fella feel so weak—"

"I wish I knew, John," I said, "but all I know is that it's Harkinson. The boys all know him. They have his number, the same as you. He's a hypnotizer."

Rolling Stone John looked at me for a full minute; then he wiped his forehead again and said:

"I guess I'll be moving along pretty soon, Seckatary Hawkins. You fellas been mighty nice to me, but I guess I'd better be on my way. I'm always on the go. And anyway, I don't like to be around fellas with hypnotizing eyes. My heart won't stand it—no sir-ree. Good-night, if you're goin'. I guess I got to sleep here once more."

I walked over to him and put my hand on his shoulder.

"John Loomis," I said, "I'm glad I met you. I've had a lot of pleasure knowing you just these few days. But I'd have lots more if you'd do one thing."

"Say which?" he asked, with a careless smile on his tanned face.

"Go back home," I said; "back where your kid

brother is—and the other folks who want you. They won't saythey do, John, but they want you all the same."

He lifted my hand gently from his shoulder.

"You're good, Hawkins," he said; "I know you're all right. But you don't understand, see? You just let me alone, and I'll get there some day, maybe. Just now I ain't wanted no place—but here. Just you fellas—you and your fine pals, Hawkins, want me and nobody else in the world wants me at all. So if you don't mind—"

"All right, John," I said, and sighed.

"Good-night, Hawkins, old boy," he said.

"Good-night, John."

And I put on my cap and buttoned up my coat collar. As I walked up the path to the main road, I could not help thinking of Harkinson, and the strange way he acted.

"I wonder what's wrong with him," I said to myself; "I bet we catch him before many days."

Which we did.

XXXI

The Prayer in the Log House

ON MY way to school next morning, I found Briggen, the Pelham leader, waiting for me at the corner.

"I got to tell you something, Hawkins," he said; and he had a worried, frightened look on his face. "Us Pelham fellas went spying on Harkinson and his rebels last night."

"Rebels?" I repeated.

"Yeah, them what broke against Long Tom and went with Harkinson. They got a purty good dugout on Burney's Field. We spied on 'em last night, Dave Burns and Ham Gardner and me."

"I thought Ham was afraid to go near Harkinson," I said.

"He ain't afraid no more," said Briggen; "no use to be afraid no more; Harkinson is turned Christian, the old hypnotizer has. We heard him a-praying there in his hole in the ground. It was sad; yes sir, Hawkins, praying like he was going to die or something—"

"What!" I exclaimed. "You're telling me the truth, Briggen?"

"Sure as I'm standing here. I heard it myself—and Dave heard it, and Ham heard it; and when Ham heard it, he got his nerve back, he wasn't afraid of Harkinson no more. Now, what I wants to know, Hawkins, is what's the matter with Harkinson—why should he pray to God like he is afraid of some awful thing, and what is it that makes Ham so brave when he used to be so scared of the old hypnotizer?"

"Go back and watch there all day, Briggen," I said. "This afternoon when school is out I'll come over with some of our boys. Something must be wrong—you'd better go, and, if anything happens, come back and tell me."

After school we held our meeting in the clubhouse, and the boys then went with their sleds and skates to see the new sled track that Jerry Moore and Roy Dobel had been bragging about, over on a hill near Dobel's farm. I sat alone in my little writing room, while Rolling Stone John sat in his old place by the stove reading a fairy story book that used to belong to Frankie Kane.

"Hawkins! Oh, Seck!" Shadow called from outside. I hurried outside and found him on the porch.

"Hi, Shadow, old boy," I said, "what's on your mind?"

I held the door open. Shadow did not answer me. His gaze went over my head, into the clubhouse, where his no-account brother John sat with his feet upon the fender of the stove. But John acted as though he didn't hear a word.

"Has he been here ever since—"

"Ever since you met him here, Shadow, "I answered. "And it seems like he might be here forevermore. I ain't the one to turn him out, you know that. He can sleep in our clubhouse as long as he wants."

Shadow waved his hand.

"Pass him," he said. "Let's talk about something else. I've got that ice skooter down here on the river, and you'll be surprised how fine those sails work. Tere's a stiff wind blowing—suppose we go for a ride? I've come all the way down on it."

Together we walked down to the river bank. The river was still frozen over from bank to bank. Beside our ice-locked wharf stood the most beautiful ice boat I ever saw, with sails so arranged that it could quickly be made to catch any wind, forward or backward. While I was telling Shadow how much I admired it, I saw three boys running over the ice to us. They shouted to me, and waved their hands, and I saw it was Briggen, Dave Burns, and Ham Gardner.

"Shadow," I said, "don't start any fighting now, I know you got a grudge against Briggen, but this ain't the time to settle it, old boy."

"All right," said Shadow with a smile, and he turned and walked back a few feet from where I stood.

"Hawkins," said Briggen, "something's doing. Four Red Runners went back up the river this morning on skates. Looks like they left old Harkinson in the lurch, gave him the shake—"

"I got you," I said; "I got you, Briggen. There's only two over there in the hiding place now—"

"No, there ain't none there now," interrupted Briggen, "they're all gone—four went up and two went down the river. Now, what do you make out of that?"

"Only two went down—you're sure of that, Briggen?"

"Sure as I'm alive."

"No use me going over to Burney's Field then—you go back to your side, Briggen, and wait—watch for the others, if they come back, you know. Stay on your side, will you?"

Briggen promised to do what I told him, and the three of 'em went back to their side across the river. I was excited. The very thought of capturing Harkinson made me full of fire. If four went up and two down the

river, it was a cinch that the two were hiding in the log house on the island.

"Shadow," I said, "this is our chance, yours and mine. We can capture the hypnotizer ourselves, Shadow—don't ask me why—I know we can. Will you go?"

It was like asking Shadow if he would have a million dollars. Sure he'd go. And so we started for the island. I sat myself in that forty-mile-an-hour ice skooter of his, and he gripped the sail ropes, and oh, boy, we were off like a flash—how we sailed! It seemed to me as if the wind thought this little ice sailboat was its plaything, for it certainly was sailed along at a lively clip—and it was only once that we stopped—once when we drew in to shore and Shadow motioned for me to be silent. I didn't know what was coming off until I saw about five minutes later, a single solitary Red Runner pass us, going up stream on skates. He wore No. 5 on his sleeve.

"Now, then," said Shadow, after No. 5 had gone around the upper bend, "let's go."

Go we did. And we didn't stop until we came to the island.

"What now, Hawkins?" asked Shadow Loomis, as we stood before the log house.

"He's inside," I answered; "Harkinson's there, Shadow, all by himself."

Shadow hesitated.

"I wish it were Androfski," he said, and he bit his lip.

"Come on," I cried, "it's Harkinson, him with the hypnotizing eyes, Shadow. What better capture could you make—"

"I know, I know," broke in Shadow, "you fellas have worked yourselves up into excitement over Harkinson.

When I know Harkinson ain't the one to be afraid of at all. It's Androfski, Hawkins, he's the one you'll be taking your hat off to when all is said and done. As for this Harkinson—"

"Listen," I said, sharply.

From the log house came a whimpering sound—a crooning, crying sound—No! Never could I believe that to be the voice of Harkinson.

"By golly, Shadow," I said, "some one else is in that log house. That's not Harkinson's voice. Listen!"

Together we listened again. Again came that crooning, that crying—no boy ever cried like that—

"Oh, God!" it came to us over that silent island stillness, "Oh, God, save me from this, save me from this."

Shadow Loomis turned and looked at me. But I could not look him in the face. Something told me. Now, I don't know what it was that told me; I don't want you to ask me what told me; because I don't know. All I know is that something told me that Harkinson was praying to God to save him from something—

"Have pity on me, oh Lord—save me—don't let this happen to me, oh, Lord—"

Yeah, that's what I heard coming from between those cracks in the logs of that old ramshackle log house. And I want to tell you right here that no matter if it was Harkinson or somebody else, my heart went out to him—yeah, oh, boy, I felt sorry for that fella, whoever he was, who was saying over and over to himself, "Oh Lord, save me from this."

"For God's sake, Hawkins," said Shadow Loomis. He gripped my arm. "For God's sake, Hawkins," he repeated. Then, without another word, he turned and ran from this spot. And I followed him. Yeah, cowardlike I followed Shadow, running as fast as we could, and

we did not stop till we pulled up at our secret headquarters, the old houseboat that formerly belonged to the Skinny Guy, Link Lambert and his pop, in the backwater pool, "the lily pond."

For half an hour we sat there, silent, never looking at one another. I let myself rest. Believe me, I didn't know what to do. I knew that here was our chance to capture Harkinson, one of the worst Red Runners, one that the Sheriff would be glad to get, and yet something about his crying and whimpering and praying in that old log house made me afraid to touch my hand upon it.

"Shadow," I said, "we ought to have taken him."

"You do it," said Shadow. "I don't want to touch him. I don't want anything to do with the fella who asked God to have mercy"

"No," I said. And then we both were silent.

How long we would have sat there, in that old reminder of our Skinny Guy, no one knows. The next thing I remember is Jerry Moore's voice:

"That's Hawkins's footprints, take my word. Nobody but the Seckatary wears that square-toe shoe."

Then a full minute of silence. I could barely hear the slush of their feet through the snow.

"Ah!"

It was Jerry, standing in the doorway of the houseboat. Behind him were Dick Ferris, Lew Hunter, Roy Dobel, Johnny McLarren, Bill Darby, and Perry Stokes. They had skated down the frozen river.

"So here y'are," continued Jerry, "so here y'are, Hawkins, and you, Shadow Loomis. What's the idea running away from us? Think we couldn't trace the tracks o' this homemade ice boat? Listen, what's the game down here? Has Pelham fellas steered you wrong?"

"Steered us wrong?" I interrupted; "steered us wrong—Jerry, you go to the other end of the island—the block house—"

"A Red Runner's there, most likely," said Jerry, "else you fellas wouldn't a' come down. Now, listen here, Hawkins, if there's a red-jacket in that log house, we're gon'a smoke him out, see? Makes no difference what you think—no matter if you are Seckatary—if it's a Red Runner he goes to the Sheriff and the calaboose—no soft hearties for me, eh, Dick?"

"I'm Captain," said Dick, "and if there's a Red Runner hereabouts, he's got to be taken alive to the Sheriff."

"Alive?" I said, "all right then. Dick, you lead. We will come with you."

Honestly, I didn't think we would take that Red Runner alive. I didn't think it was Harkinson. The voice that Shadow and I heard did not sound like the voice of Harkinson. It had been so changed. I thought then—

"Who's in there?" yelled Dick Ferris, as we stood before the log house.

No answer. Only the whimpering—only the crooning sound—only that cry-baby voice—

"Oh, God, have mercy—save me from this, save me from this—"

Dick and Jerry stood and talked together before the log-house door. As we waited, there came the sound of metal against the ice—we turned and saw a skating figure leap from the ice to the bank—it was Androfski—you could not mistake that beak of a nose under which hung a half-moon smile—

He held up his hand—he could not talk—Androfski the Silent.

We all fell aside. We saw him kick one skate from his foot. The next instant he had sprung to the door, limping on one free foot and one foot that still held a skate—

He opened the door of the log house. He stepped inside for a moment; then came out again, and, leaning upon his arm was Harkinson, staring straight at us, but the steely glitter was gone from his eyes.

"*He—is—blind!*"

I saw the words form on the lips of Androfski the Silent. Yeah, I had been trained to watch the lips of Androfski—now he was saying the awfullest thing I had ever heard him say in his silent way—that Harkinson, the hypnotizer, no longer could see. At once I knew, what those words meant that we had heard coming from behind the logs of the old stockade. Harkinson was blind. He could no longer use those steely eyes of his—

I saw Jerry Moore step forward. I saw Dick Ferris lift his hand—

"Seckatary Hawkins," said Dick, "we have captured Harkinson—"

"I'll have nothing to do with it," I cried; "I'll not touch him, Dick Ferris, not for you nor any of the boys—"

Androfski was holding up his hand. I watched his lips.

"He—cannot—see. Allow—me—to—take—him—back—"

"Take him back, Androfski," I said, patting him on the back, "and take care of him."

"Look here, look here," broke in Jerry Moore, "you think you're mighty smart, Hawkins, but we got

"LEANING ON HIS ARM WAS HARKINSON."

a word to say in this. Nobody is gonna take this Harkinson back but us, see? And we will take him back to the Sheriff, we will. That's where he belongs. What've you got to say to that, Androfski?"

Neither Androfski nor Harkinson made a sound.

"Just one moment!"

A new voice had rung in. A new figure stepped into the half circle. It was the Rolling Stone, John Loomis.

"Fair play," he cried; "Shame on you fellas who don't give fair play. I want to see the first guy who won't let these two red birds pass the line."

How quick Jerry Moore fell back! How quick the others gave room!

"This way!" It was Shadow's own voice saying that. And leading Androfski and Harkinson to his own ice skooter—

We took them up to our clubhouse. Yeah, Harkinson, blind Harkinson, lay in our clubhouse at last a prisoner, if you want to call him that, but none of us fellas thought so. No. We wanted him to get his eyesight back. That's all. Makes no difference what he was, or what he did to us, now he was a blind boy—something always was wrong with his eyes, that's what Doc Waters said, and it was this that made us always think he was a hypnotizer. It was the Rolling Stone who insisted on taking him to our clubhouse until something could be done for him. And Perry Stokes went and brought Doc Waters down. There, on the Rolling Stone's pallet on the floor beside my desk, we laid him down while Doc Waters looked into his eyes—those eyes that had often made us shiver when they peeped at us—but now no longer could see.

When Doc had finished the examination, Androfski was gone. None of the boys had seen him go. But

Androfski had waited only until he knew his side partner was safe—then he had skooted out into his own freedom. He knew the Sheriff wanted him and he was not going to let anybody take him prisoner. Doc Waters promised to see that Harkinson was taken care of, and the boys all left, one by one, for their homes.

When we were left alone, Doc said to me:

"Hawkins, you've known this boy Harkinson for a long time?"

"Yes, Doc," I said, "ever since last summer; I met him when I came home from Cuba."

"And he always had these—what you call hypnotizing eyes?"

"Yes, Doc, that's what made us boys so afraid of him."

Doc shook his head.

"Poor fella," he said; "and he was growing blind all the time. I never saw a case like it in my whole life."

Rolling Stone John stepped up.

"I can look after him a while, doctor," he said; "if you want to go back—"

"Yes, yes," said Doc; "you let him stay here until tonight. He must go to the hospital at once. I will see to that. To-night you boys bring him to my office."

Which we did.

XXXII

The Roundup

HARKINSON was gone. Doc Waters had got a permit for him in one of the finest hospitals in Watertown. He was stone blind. For a long time his eyes had been failing him, Doc said, and that steely glitter which had so many times made us believe he was a hypnotizer was only the change that was making his sight dimmer and dimmer, until at last the light went out altogether. Harkinson knew, those last few days, that he was going blind. And Jude, the fifth in line, told him only God could save him from being blind, and Harkinson—old rough-and-ready Harkinson—began to pray night and day to God to save him from blindness. Harkinson, who hardly knew how to pray, began to pray—Oh! I'll never forget how I heard him calling to God that day when we had him cornered in the log cabin.

But Jude the Fifth had disappeared. Androfski had disappeared. No longer could they dare to hang around our neighborhood. For when the split came between Long Tom and Harkinson, Jude the Fifth and Androfski the Silent had stuck to Harkinson, along with three others. But the three others had left Harkinson in the lurch when they found he was going blind—no blind leader for them. No, sir. They had run back to join Long Tom's bunch again. So had Androfski. But when Jude came and told Androfski that Harkinson had really gone blind, and was left alone in the blockhouse Androfski had come to give his old side partner the last help he could give. And when he was sure that Harkin-

son would be taken care of, Androfski had disappeared. So had Jude. No more did we see of either of them, although Shadow Loomis looked for a long time for the Silent One, to settle that long-standing quarrel that they had between them. But it seemed as though it should not be settled.

Most of this we learned through Perry Stokes, who had gone with Doc Waters when they took Harkinson to the hospital. Perry had talked to Harkinson, and had learned all these things from him. Harkinson was a different boy, said Perry. In that land of everlasting night, Harkinson lay back upon his pillow and thought about old times, times when he had his sight, and when he made every boy afraid to look him in the eye; when he had been the leader of a large number of redcoats, and shared honors with Long Tom himself. But of the quarrel which caused the split-up in the Red Runners, Harkinson never spoke. One thing, at least, you must say of Harkinson; he was true blue to his partners, and he never squealed. No matter what you might say about the Red Runners, you will have to admit that not a single one of 'em ever squealed on their gang.

And, then, one night—I'll never forget it—it was on January 27, Doc Waters came for me. I was at home, doing my lessons for the next day, when Doc came. My mother opened the door for him.

"If you won't mind, Mrs. Hawkins," he said, "I'd like to have the Seckatary go along with me to-night —I've got to take a run to Watertown."

"Certainly, doctor," said my mother, "I like to have him go with you whenever you want him—I hope he will not make you too much trouble—"

"It's a pleasure, Mrs. Hawkins," said Doc (Doc always tried to say things like that so I would hear it;

he was a great kidder). "I'd rather have the Seckatary along with me than any boy in town."

When I was seated beside Doc in his little machine, and we were making thirty miles an hour on the road to Watertown, I said:

"What's the idea? Why did you come for me?"

"I got a request," he answered; "I was asked to bring you. Wait, you'll understand."

Yeah, I understood. I seemed to know that he would take me to that hospital in which lay the fellow who one time was the only boy I was afraid to meet. Harkinson lay back upon a little white cot—

"You—is it you, Hawkins boy?" he asked, as I walked up to his bed. His voice sounded strange and low. His hand barely lifted.

"It's me, Harkinson," I said; and I tried to make my voice sound friendly; "it's me, old-timer, I'm glad to see you."

"I'm glad you come—they told me you would come—sorry I can't see your old face again—but it's all over, that is. Wait."

He dropped my hand, and laid his own upon his forehead. I saw a look of pain pass over his pale face. What a change in that face, thought I. Once I had said Harkinson's face was the hardest, toughest face I had ever seen. Now it was all changed; there was a softened look about his eyes; his lips seemed thin and pale—

"They won't tell me the truth, Hawkins," he said, "they say I will get well and see again. But I know—I ain't long for this world no more; I'm going down a longer river than I ever paddled before, Hawkins, and I ain't goin' to wear no red coat no 'more—feel here—"

He pulled my hand down and placed it on his breast.

Under those coverlets I could feel the loud, fast thumping of his heart. It startled me.

"Heart going too fast," said Harkinson, "can't stand it no longer without my eyes, y'know. Got to see or can't live. I won't be long."

"Nonsense," I said, "you mustn't talk like that, Harkinson. Doc will see you through. It's going to take time, that's all."

There was a grim smile upon his face, but he shook his head.

"It's over," he said; "I know; I've called my redcoats for the last time, Hawkins. I only want to tell you yet that I am sorry for what I did to you; you been a square an' honest boy with me, and I treated you raw. I'm sorry for that—before I go, I want to tell you. You believe me?"

"You've never done anything to me, old-timer," I said, bending down; "you've been all right; it's all fair when you're fighting—"

"I used to think that," broke in the blind boy; "but, no, it ain't so, Hawkins. You find that out when you git time to think about it. I've been thinking about it ever since the long night time came—and it's dark where I am, no daytime, no light, Hawkins—"

"But it won't be for long, Harkinson," I said; "Doc Waters will fix you up all right, buddy—"

"Just one thing," said Harkinson, "I want you to have something, Hawkins. I know I ain't goin' to last—I want you to remember me always when I'm gone—"

"Don't talk like that, Harkinson," I said, "you're going to get well, and see again, in a little while. Don't you know good old Doc Waters can do things?"

"He can't fix this heart o' mine," said Harkinson,

with a smile; "it's broke—beating faster that a woodpecker can peck—and harder than a sledge hammer—but here, Hawkins, this is for you to remember me by."

He reached a weak hand under his pillow and pulled out the old brass horn—the old relic of Stoner's Boy—the old trumpet whose brassy notes had sounded a summons and a warning many a time around our old camping ground.

"To remember me, Hawkins," he said, "I don't care who forgets—but you remember me always, will you?"

I took the horn. Yeah, I took it, but I could not thank him for it. I could not say a word. I had to turn away. For something about that poor old Harkinson lying there made tears come into my eyes, and I walked away and wiped my eyes on my sleeve. I stood there, a long time, until Doc came tip-toeing over and said, "He is asleep; come on, let's get back home."

. . . . . .

Our clubhouse still was watched by Long Tom's Red Runners. They didn't seem to mind Harkinson's misfortune. I don't think they cared one bit that he was not with them any more. Jerry Moore came in one night following and told us that he had been caught by two of them, but that he had broken away from them. Another night Lew Hunter was playing the organ all alone in the clubhouse, and they had scared him at the windows.

It was time to put a stop to it. So we held a council meeting in the clubhouse after school one day, and tried to figure out a plan to catch them. Nothing came of it, however. One plan after another was thrown aside, because it wouldn't do. After the meeting broke up, I sat alone in my little office and thought it over. Suddenly an idea came into my head.

That evening I had all my plans laid. I hurried down to the clubhouse right after supper. None of the boys had come yet. Presently I heard voices outside. It was Lew Hunter and the preacher, with whom he lived. They came in together.

"Ah, Seckatary Hawkins," said the preacher, for he was a good friend of us boys; "I hope you have found it in your heart to forgive poor Harkinson."

"Forgive him? What for?" I asked.

"He's doing very poorly," said the preacher; "Dr. Waters has asked me to go up and console him a bit, and I'm on my way to Watertown now. May I take a message of good cheer from you? It will do him much good to know it comes from you; the doctor tells me he speaks of you every day."

"Tell him," I said, "tell him that Seckatary Hawkins wishes him all that is good—and hopes only that the daylight will soon come to him as it does to us—every morning he will see the sunrise."

"Ah, that is nice, nice," said the preacher. "Good-bye."

We waited until his step died out in the snow. Then I said to Lew:

"Did you take my message to the Sheriff?"

"Yes, everything is fixed. They are waiting now outside the second row of trees. They thought you were crazy to ask them to do it."

"Oh, well, maybe I am," I said, "I ain't sure that it will do any good. But I've got a scheme. It might work."

"And I told the other boys to wait on the main road till they heard something. They asked me what that 'something' would be, so they would know. But I told them just as you ordered me."

"That's right, Lew. They'll know well enough, as soon as they hear it. Suppose you play a tune on the organ, so that somebody knows we are here."

Lew played. The same old thing he always played when you asked him to play what he liked. "Lead, Kindly Light, Amid th' Encircling Gloom."

How it sounded to me then. Ah, boy! I heard it many times, played in the same way by that same Lew Hunter, and every time it seemed to mean something different to me. To me always it was a prayer—a prayer to God Almighty to lead us the right way, no matter where we were bound for; a prayer to take us on and see us through.

And what it meant for the Red Runners that night? "Lead, Kindly Light" rang for those Red Runners, too, that night. For I know that from that night on, nine out of every ten of those redcoats changed from their lawless ways to ways that would lead them on to better boys and better men when they grew up. Yeah, "Lead, Kindly Light" was the right song; Lew Hunter knew what he was playing. Like a flame on the tip of a candle which draws insects in the night, that song drew those Red Runners from out their hiding places—I could see out of the corner of my eye once in a while a face appear for a moment at this window—at that window—only to disappear again into the gloom. If I could only draw them inside, as I planned—if they would only forget that Harkinson—

"Now!" I said—"it's time, Lew. Stop the organ a minute."

He snatched his fingers off the ivory keys. At the same time I whipped out of my pocket the old brass horn that Harkinson had given me—snatched it out and put it to my lips and blew two shrill blasts upon it;

"Don't Cheer For Me — Give The Credit To This Old Brass Horn."

then, as Lew Hunter ran to the door and threw it open wide, I blew once again two hearty calls—

They came. Golly Moses, how they came! And if you think their crowd was made smaller by the split-up between Harkinson and Long Tom, you're mistaken. They came in, I tell you, like a swarm of bees—they had been hanging around outside, waiting for something to happen, and when they heard the call of that old brass horn—well, it was only force of habit, you might say, but they trooped in. In a minute they had realized their blunder—Long Tom's voice reminded them that Harkinson and his horn no longer belonged to them—but it was too late. Long Tom screamed his orders—but what use? The Sheriff and his deputies were on the porch, at every window—there was no escape.

"Long Tom," droned the Sheriff, "you and your friends will come with me."

The Red Runners were rounded up.

. . . . . .

We had a little celebration in the clubhouse after they were taken away. All of our boys had heard the horn, and knew that that was the "something" I had told them they would hear before they were to come to the clubhouse. As it was, they all arrived in time to see the Sheriff and his men march the red gang away.

"Stand up and shout three cheers for your old Seckatary!" yelled Jerry Moore.

They jumped to their feet and gave me the three loudest hurrahs I had ever heard. I laughed and bowed, and held up the old brass horn.

"Don't cheer for me," I said, "give the credit to this old brass horn—and to the old hypnotizer who gave it to me—Harkinson."

'Three cheers for Harkinson!" cried Jerry.

But there were no cheers. No. No cheers. For he had no more than said that when the door opened and the preacher walked slowly into our meeting room.

"Boys," he said in a low voice; then he stopped, and took off his hat and looked at the floor; for a minute he stood that way. Then he lifted his face and said:

"He won't want cheers—rather your prayers. Harkinson—your friend Harkinson—died at seven o'clock to-night."

For a moment there was a silence in which you could have heard the breeze rustle in the evergreen cedars on the river path. The next instant every boy had snatched off his cap, and bowed his head. I wondered then, what was going through their minds. But I knew it was sorrow—sympathy for the old-time leader—regret that the old hypnotizer could not have lived to see the time when—

Ah, but what's the use to talk about that? What's the use to say it might have been when it can't be. You ask me to write down here things that I can't figure out. I don't want to think of Harkinson passing out like that. God called him home. His eyes went blank and his heart swelled up and broke from worrying over it, don't tell me. I felt like crying myself when the preacher said those soft-toned words—

I sometimes sit in my little office and think about that—wonder how it was that all of us boys, who hated Harkinson as any boy can hate another boy, felt so sad about his passing out of this life into the Great Dark Land that some fellows like the preacher call the next world—but I can't figure it out. I know that the old brass horn will stay with me as long as I live,

and that I will always think of it, and the boy who gave it to me, as among the dearest things I ever had to think about.

"If you boys feel like you want to," the preacher was saying, "let us all kneel right here, in the little clubhouse where Harkinson so often stood, and pray for the repose of his soul."

Which we did.